The History of Aviation

IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

1913 - 1962

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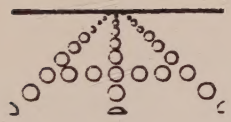
The History of Aviation in Trinidad & Tobago 1913 - 1962



The History of Aviation in Trinidad & Tobago 1913 - 1962

by
The Airports Authority
of
Trinidad & Tobago

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To the men and women who pioneered aviation in Trinidad and Tobago.

Contents

Chapter 1	The Beginning/Early Aviators	1
Chapter 2	The Era of the Flying Boats	15
Chapter 3	The Birth of Piarco	27
Chapter 4	The Pioneering Thirties	37
Chapter 5	1940	54
Chapter 6	The World War Two Airbases	67
Chapter 7	To Win A War	81
Chapter 8	The Aviation Hub of the Caribbean	96
	Epilogue	121
	Glossary	131
	Bibliography	136
	Aircraft Index	143
	Index	153

Plates

FOLLOWING PAGE 36

1913 – 1930

Frank Boland's Biplane	1913
Registration of Frank Boland's Internment	1913
José Solis	1913
Edmund "Erl" Lickfold	1916
Aircraft donated for War Effort (W.W.I.)	
Kenneth John Knaggs	1917
Tombstone of Kenneth John Knaggs	
Flyers in the Royal Air Force W.W.I.	
Flyers in the Royal Air Force W.W.I.	
The R.A.F. memorial at Queen's Royal College	
Pan Am Strato Clipper	1920
US Army Leoning OA 1A Amphibian	
Port of Spain	1927
Bill Lancaster's Avro Avian	1929
Wreckage of Lancaster's Avro Avian	1929
Mr. Laughlin, U.S. Army Pilot, British Army Officer, Colonel May, Cocorite	1929
Pan Am Sikorsky, Cocorite	1930
Pan Am Sikorsky, on point of take-off Cocorite	1930
Pan Am Flying Boat, Cocorite	
The D.O.X., Port of Spain Habour	1930
Latécoère's Single Engine Aircraft	1930

FOLLOWING PAGE 66

1931 — 1939

Terminal Building, at Piarco	1931
Letter from the Compagnie Générale Aéropostale	1931
Maurice Lange	
Excerpt from Edmund Lickfold's Logbook	
Edmund "Erl" Lickfold	1932
First Ground Engineer's Licence issued in Trinidad	1932
The Graffzeplin	1933
Michael "Mikey" Cipriani	
Cipriani and Wife	
Cipriani's Aircraft "Humming Bird"	
Wreckage of "Humming Bird II"	1934
Cipriani and Bradshaw's funeral procession	1934
Memorial of Cipriani and Bradshaw	
Frank "Jack" St. Hilaire's aircraft	1937
Frank "Jack" St. Hilaire	
K.L.M. at Piarco	1938
K.L.M. at Piarco	1938
K.L.M. Terminal Building	1938
Piarco Savannah	1939
Pan Am's flying boat	1939

FOLLOWING PAGE 95

1940 – 1946

Governor Sir Hubert Young
His Excellency and Lady Young 1940
Mayor Short, Aide-de-Camp to Governor Young
B.W.I.A.'s VP-TAW Vickers Viking
Lowell Yerex, founder of B.W.I.A. 1941
Crown Point Runway 1943
Blackburn "Roc", L3084
No. 752 Reliants Squadron 1943
Crown Point Runway 1943
Mucurapo Field 1943
Xeres Runway 1943
U.S. Navy K Type Airship K77,
Carlsen Field 1944
Carlsen Field Blimp matt 1944
Piarco Airport 1944
Lancaster Bomber
Edinburgh Field Runway 1945
Lieutenant J.F. Carroll and Horace Bowen
Pilots of No. 750 Fleet Air Arm Squadron
Capt. P.W. Kelshall, Kenrick Murray,
Malcolm Jones, Malcolm Barcant, John Rahr,
Eamon Luengo 1946
Ulric Cross

FOLLOWING PAGE 120

1948 – 1986

Esmond Farfan, Hélène Majani, Keith Maingot	1948
Neville Pereira, Etienne Majani, Yvonne Lange	1948
Carl Agostini, Albert Gomes, Esmond Farfan at Piarco	
Piarco International Airport Circa	circa 1950
B.W.I.A. Viscount VP-TBK	1955
Pearl Marshall	
Douglas DC-3	
Piarco Airport	1960
The Light Aeroplane Club Building	
"The Inherent Nobility of Man" mural by Carlisle Chang	
The Main Concourse at Piarco	
George Livingstone, George Thornhill, Ralph Crouch in the Control Tower	
The New Piarco Airport Terminal	1962
Eric Patience	1986
Bel Air Hotel	1986
The L10 II Tri Star	1986
The Supersonic Jet, "Concorde"	1986

Foreword

September 1986

I feel gratified and honoured by this invitation to comment on the History of Aviation in Trinidad and Tobago.

During my 32 years with the Department of Civil Aviation and afterwards, I had always hoped that someone would attempt to record in print the Aviation History of our Republic. I was therefore delighted to learn that the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago under the Chairmanship of Mr. Selwyn Richardson - had decided to compile this historical document as a tribute to the men and women of our nation who have fostered and advanced the development of aviation for the past seventy-three years.

As producer of this book the Airports Authority must be complimented for setting itself such a challenging task. It is common knowledge that the records of our aviation history have been in the possession of diverse sources such as Government departments, newspaper files and private individuals. All held pieces of the History of Aviation in Trinidad and Tobago and the Authority defied all odds to find and put the pieces together.

To collect, collate and edit all of what is herein written must have been a very difficult assignment for Mr. Gaylord Kelshall and the Authority's writers and researchers since most of the information had to be gleaned from a number of disparate persons, who were at one time or another involved in Aviation.

To the best of my knowledge this book is as

accurate as any of its kind and perhaps more so since the information was gathered from people who shaped our aviation history and are still alive today, and from the descendants of others who had the foresight to share knowledge and documents with their families.

As the book reveals, Trinidad and Tobago's aviation heroes were among the best and bravest of their time. During a Trinidad and Tobago Television interview on Civil Aviation some years ago, I said it appeared to me that people of our Republic had a great affinity for flying in much the same manner as the British make great sailors and soldiers and the Americans great engineers and airmen. This statement is backed up by the large numbers of Trinidadians and Tobagonians who volunteered for service in the RFC/RAF during World Wars I and II and who covered themselves with glory. The excellent fatal accident-free record of the National Airline BWIA, whose aircrew is almost 100% local, also bears ample testimony to this.

I have enjoyed reading about both the nationals and foreigners who shaped the destiny of Trinidad and Tobago's aviation. Individuals like Frank Boland, Edmund Lickfold, Mikey Cipriani, Claude Vincent, Maurice Lange, Governor Sir Hubert Young and Lady Young, Frank St. Hilaire and Lowell Yerex, pioneered aviation in this country and in their own special way were instrumental in making Trinidad and Tobago consistently the centre of attention and the hub of Caribbean Aviation.

I extend my most heartfelt congratulations to the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for producing this excellent book of local history which

no doubt will be an important educational text for generations to come.

Ralph Ernest Crouch
Ret'd Director of Civil Aviation (1980)

General Manager's Message

When we gamely accepted the daunting challenge of the then Chairman of the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Selwyn Richardson to compile a History of the Development of Aviation in Trinidad and Tobago, we were at once excited and apprehensive.

We had heard to that time, colourful accounts of our early aviators who had performed with distinction at both military and civil aviation and we were truly thrilled. Our fears, however, inevitably derived from the fact that such accounts were being related by obviously partial observers and the availability of documentary evidence to substantiate their stories, was questionable. Then, too, the research required to produce a book of the calibre comtemplated, called for specific human and material resources, not available within the Airports Authority. Though eager therefore, there were times when we nervously wondered whether we had bitten off just a little too much.

The same providence that guided the development of aviation over the years, was however to lead the Authority to the avid Aviation Historian Gaylord Kelshall. Without his most valuable input, both material and moral, this work would not have been as excellent.

Also unearthed in the process of compiling the book were two young and dedicated officers, Carol Williams-Mitchell and Robert Boodoosingh, who

functioned within an equally committed Public Relations Department, headed by Kathleen Weekes. Knowing no bounds of time, this team worked long and hard in researching and collating the material. Their search took them to those of our own pioneers who are still alive as well as to archives both in Europe and North America.

Generally, the text ought to be required reading for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly those with an interest in aviation or with a concern for national pride.

So rich are the experiences that are herein recorded, as to dare the world to ignore the proud contribution that this little country, strategically located, has made and continues to make, to international aviation.

Before inviting you to read this landmark publication, the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago wishes to thank all those who have contributed to the success of the effort. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the former Chairman, Mr. Richardson and to the members of the Second Board of the Authority, for their sustained interest and guidance; and to staff member, Mr. Lloyd Pierre whose photographic wizardry enabled the reproduction of the very old pictures presented throughout the book. The selfless contributions of special editor, Mr. Michael Anthony, are also to be mentioned with thanks.

Please accept therefore, our confident assurance, that upon reading this text, "The History of Aviation in Trinidad and Tobago", you shall treasure its stunning revelations for as long as you shall live.

OSWIN E. MOORE
November, 1986

Acknowledgements

The Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago wishes to (publicly) acknowledge the following individuals and organisations who have given assistance and support to the production of The History of Aviation in Trinidad and Tobago, by sharing information, private documents, participating in interviews and conducting research on our behalf. To those noted below and others we may have inadvertently neglected to mention, we wish to express our sincerest thanks and appreciation for your support and interest in the compiling of this comprehensive text on our national aviation history.

Michael Anthony, Dr. Maxwell Awon, Richard Barran, Samuel Bhagwansingh, June Carrington, Carlisle Fenwick Chang, Hilary Correia (née Lickfold), Ulric Cross, Ralph Crouch, Eugene De La Rosa, John Dobson, Esmond Farfan, Fernand Farfan, Hélène Farfan (née Majani), Yolanda Franco, Frank Fuller, Robert Gibson, Arnold Gonzales, Sir Lindsay Grant, Arnold Kelshall, Phillip Kelshall, Rosalie Kelshall, Percy J. Knox, Emmanuel "Noche" Lange, Yvonne Lange, Errol J. Lau, Luke Lee, Edmumd Lickfold, Garth Lyder, Sally May, Anthony Mora, Thomas Myers, Eric Patience, Vernon Pereira, Alex Revell, Johnny Rooks, Jack Rose, Frank St. Hilaire, Anthony Scott, Gerard Seignoret, Mayow Short, Eric Solis, Roland Van Klaveran, Sqn. Ldr. Harry Vincent, Mervyn Webb, Gregory Williams, William Woodcock, Anthony Yerex. Department of Civil Aviation of T & T, National Archives of Trinidad & Tobago,

The Light Aeroplane Club of Trinidad & Tobago, U.S.A. Army Records, Washington, Ministry of Defense (Air) London, England, Fleet Air Arm Museum, Somerset, England, U.S.A. Navy Records, Washington, U.S.A. Air Force Historical Division, Maxwell AFB, Sun Island Aviation, T & T, U.S.A. Historical Records, Ministry of Defense (Navy) London, Public Record Office, Richmond, England, National Air & Space Museum (S.I.) Washington, U.S.A., Royal Aeronautical Society, London, England, Pan American Airways Incorporated in T & T, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines in T & T, The Central Library - West Indian Reference Section, RAF Officers' Records, Gloucester, England, The British High Commission in T & T, Imperial War Museum, London, England, Trinidad & Tobago (BWIA Int'l) Airways Corporation, West Indian Reference Section, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus.

WRITER

Gaylord Kelshall

Gaylord Kelshall entered the world of aviation in 1958 with BWIA Flight Operations Department at Piarco. While with the airline, he obtained his first pilot's licence and flew with the Light Aeroplane Club. In 1964, he was commissioned into the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, where he flew as a naval pilot with the Air Wing and took part in sport-parachuting. His last posting was with the Helicopter unit in Chaguaramas. Following his twelve years in the Defence Force, he became a Corporate Captain with Well Services and flew extensively throughout

the Caribbean, North and South America. He is a historian specialising in the military and aviation fields as well as being a consultant.

SPECIAL EDITOR

The Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago would like especially to thank Mr. Michael Anthony for the many hours he devoted to the editing and indexing of our work.

Mr. Anthony is a noted author and historian who has written several books including "First in Trinidad", "The Year in San Fernando" and "The Making of Port of Spain 1798 - 1939", his most recent publication being "Heroes of the People".

We are deeply indebted to this historian for his invaluable contribution to making "The History of Aviation in Trinidad and Tobago" a reality and a success.

November, 1986.

Prologue

The angry snarl of the Cirrus engine grew louder as the gloved hand of the pilot eased the throttle forward. The airframe vibrated as the slipstream from the whirling disc of the propeller buffeted the tail and power coursed through the machine. The de Havilland Moth began to roll and the pilot eased the control column forward to get the tail up off the grass. The flying machine gathered speed and as the tail came up, the pilot's booted feet gingerly corrected the tendency to swing on takeoff. A glance at the instruments told the pilot that the oil pressure was steady and the speed was right. He applied a slight back pressure and the Moth was airborne.

For a brief moment, the wheels vibrated as the weight of the aircraft came off them, then they began to slow down. Gracefully the Moth swept upwards, with the sun glinting off its wings and cowling, as the pilot kept it in a steady climb. Out of the corner of his eye, he glimpsed a small group of excited people hopping about on his left, but he could not hear their shouts of delight as he concentrated all his attention on the aeroplane. He was feeling her out. The control responses were right, the aircraft felt balanced, the engine was performing correctly and the faint smell of oil in the slipstream was as it should be. If anything had been wrong he had no one else to blame, because he had assembled the aircraft, rigged it, installed and ground the engine, and now he was flying it. Everything was right and with this knowledge, the helmeted head could at

last turn and spare a glance at the surroundings.

Ahead of him the ground was obstructed by clumps of bush and the occasional tree. To the left the hills rose majestically in their green blanket, while to the right, the savannah was broken by the meanderings of the Caroni River. Now that the aircraft was high enough, he began a gentle turn to the left to bring the machine back over the field where the small group of spectators stood. He noticed in a fleeting way that it was a beautiful day with white fluffy clouds floating against the background of a powder blue sky, but there was little time to appreciate the glory of the afternoon. He was concentrating on the performance of the aeroplane and not on the epoch-making nature of the flight, or the airfield below him.

Under him was Trinidad and Tobago's first flying field which had been opened just eight months before. The name was Piarco, an Amerindian word believed to mean, the place of sweet water and indeed, not long before the field was always under water.

The pilot was the veteran First World War flying instructor and fighter pilot Edmund Richard Lickfold. The time was three thirty in the afternoon and the date was 19th September, 1931.

Near the hangar on the ground stood Mikey Cipriani, the first Trinidadian to own an aircraft and the Moth that Lickfold was flying was his. Alongside him stood his wife Daisy, with Lickfold's wife, the children of the two men, a few helpers and well wishers and Percy Hosten. Percy had introduced Cipriani and Lickfold earlier in the year, when Cipriani had been looking for an experienced pilot

and someone with engineering experience to join him in the grand pioneering enterprise of bringing an aeroplane to Trinidad.

The flight that Saturday afternoon was not by any means the first by a Trinidadian. For fifteen years Trinidad and Tobago airmen had been piloting every type of aeroplane, sometimes in the remotest corners of the world. They had fought in aeroplanes, they had transported passengers, they had instructed trainees, they had test flown brand new aircraft types and some had died in aeroplanes, but none had ever flown an aeroplane over his home islands. None of the many early pioneers had ever flown an aircraft from Piarco flying field. Then the popular Trinidadian Michael "Mikey" Cipriani decided to make his dream of owning a flying machine a reality. He purchased a used de Havilland Moth from Canada and gave Trinidad and Tobago its first airplane. The test flight that afternoon of Cipriani's plane was another significant milestone in the consummation of the magnificent marriage of Trinidad and Tobago and the world of aviation. It was the start of another chapter in the rich tapestry of our proud aviation heritage, a chapter that linked our proven aviation ability to our unrivaled Piarco airport.

CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNING/EARLY AVIATORS

In January 1913, the intrepid American aviator Frank Boland and a party of four arrived in Trinidad and brought the world of aviation to the tranquil skies of the British Colony. Since the Wright Brothers' first flight on 17th December 1903, local newspapers had carried headline stories about Man's early flying machines and according to some, the "crazy" characters who flew them. Early aviation had its critics as well as its admirers, but to the people of Trinidad, it had all seemed very far away, until Boland arrived. Since September 1912, the group had been performing exhibitions and demonstration flights on a fund raising tour through Venezuela, Colombia and Costa Rica, and in Trinidad, which was to be their last stop, they had scheduled a public performance for January 25th. Economically, the colony was enjoying a boom period. Cocoa was at its peak, the sugar industry was stable and there was a burgeoning

oil industry. From a financial point of view, the colony was a good place to stop.

Frank was one of a trio of Boland brothers who, like the Wright brothers, had started in the bicycle business and progressed to the world of aviation and its flying machines. Unable to copy the Wright Flyer because of patents on the control surfaces, the Bolands had invented an entirely new method of control, known as the JIB. The original idea dispensed with rudders, ailerons and wing warping and instead relied on two triangular jibs mounted between the outer ends of the biplane's wings. These control surfaces were very unorthodox, but in the opinion of Wilbur Wright who witnessed a demonstration, highly efficient. In fact he said that he had never seen an aeroplane turn in a smaller circle than the Boland Machine.

When the Bolands arrived in Trinidad they learned that the Governor of Trinidad George Le Hunte could not be present for the planned demonstration on the 25th, and Boland decided to give a special flying display on the 23rd. Amid deafening cheers, the Boland biplane was rolled out of a small tent that had been set up to the east of the Grand Stand in the Savannah. Within view of a large crowd the flying machine was made ready for flight. The first of those magnificent men in their flying machines was about to perform in Trinidad. With the good wishes of the crowd, Boland took off on the first flight from Trinidad soil.

It is probable that no Trinidadian had ever seen an aeroplane before and the excitement at the Savannah as Boland soared upwards was at fever pitch, but alas, tragedy soon struck. He was coming in to land near

the area known as the Hollows, in front of Stollmeyer's Castle, when the biplane went out of control and dived into the ground, throwing Boland out of the pilot's seat. The ribs on his left side pierced his heart and he died instantly. The shock of the tragedy numbed the watching crowd and ended the previously triumphant first tour of the Caribbean and South America. According to a report in the Port of Spain Gazette of 24th January 1913, "the Very Reverend Father Sutherland O.P. said the last offices for the dead, the deceased being a Catholic". Boland's body was taken from the Colonial Hospital to the Church of the Holy Rosary and then interred at the Lapeyrouse Cemetery. It is said that the body was later exhumed and shipped to the United States to his hometown for burial at the St. Mary's Cemetery, Rahay. But his two brothers did not give up. The Bolands remained active in aviation well into the Second World War.

These early aviators were all hard put to finance their experiments and were forced to rely on demonstrations and appearances at fairs to generate capital. The early bicycle type aeroplanes were almost impossible to fly in winter conditions, with the result that the aviators looked to appearances in sunny climes to carry them through the North American non-flying season. Thus within a month of Boland's death, another intrepid aviator was in Trinidad.

George Schmidt was the American born son of a German immigrant, who had virtually taught himself to fly. His party had left New York in November, 1912 and progressed through the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, Colombia and finally arrived in Trinidad in February, 1913. His previous demonstrations in a

Baldwin biplane christened *"Red Devil"*, received considerable publicity and special trains were laid on for the thousands who were expected to flock to the city to witness the grand attempt.

On the morning of 26th February 1913, Schmidt lifted the *"Red Devil"* off the ground, from the area in front of the Queen's Park Hotel. Thousands of people witnessed the event and shouted themselves hoarse, encouraging Schmidt and his magnificent flying machine. It is reported that he reached a height of 914.6 metres (about three thousand feet) during the flight and demonstrated his masterful control of the machine. Schmidt safely landed the *"Red Devil"* after his flight and was carried shoulder high into the Queen's Park Hotel, where a champagne reception awaited him.

The flight of the *"Red Devil"* fired the imagination of the crowd, particularly some of the young boys who witnessed it and this was to influence a number of them to become Trinidad and Tobago's aerial pioneers. Two boys named *Horace Bowen and *Claude Vincent were among the thousands who witnessed that day's event. Another was a young Lieutenant of the Trinidad Volunteers named Eric Hobson, who was acting as ADC to the Governor. He witnessed both Boland's attempt and Schmidt's flight and it shaped his life.

The *"Red Devil"* was kept in an enclosed area in front of the Queen's Park Hotel and an admission fee of one shilling was charged for those who wished to view the flying machine. When maintenance and repair work became necessary, local engineer José Geronimo Solis assisted Schmidt in preparing the

**These men are also covered in Chapter 2 – pg. 19.*

airplane for flight. Solis had never seen a flying machine before but diligently applied his mechanical skills to assist the intrepid flier. Solis's young brother Felix, was also present and he like dozens of others was bitten by the flying bug. His chance was to come during the Great War.

Just over a year later, in 1914, Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austro Hungarian Empire and his wife were assasinated, while they toured Serbia. Political tensions had been building in Europe for years and the double killings triggered off the First World War. With the outbreak of war in 1914 the Trinidad Colonial government received emergency powers which gave it the authority to suppress any social and political activity which it perceived as subversive. The Trinidad Workingmen's Association for example, was one organisation whose activities were seen as such. This incipient trade union - formed in 1897 - sought to represent workers and address contemporary social issues. They also agitated for constitutional reform to the system of Crown Colony Government. However, many of Trinidad and Tobago's young men demonstrated their allegiance to Britain by immediately setting sail for England to join the armed forces of the British Empire. It was not too long before the first of these progressed to the world of aviation, where their super co-ordination marked them out as excellent aviators, lighting a spark that glows brightly to this day.

The first of Trinidad's intrepid aviators was Charles M. Pickthorne from Tobago. On 30th March 1916 he transferred from the British army to the fledgeling Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and was appointed as an Observer with No. 8 squadron. His squadron operated

over the Somme battlefield in the summer of that year flying the BE2c reconnaissance planes. He later qualified as a pilot and achieved fame when in March, 1917 he shot down the German ace Prince Frederick Karl of Prussia. At the time, he was flying an antiquated stringbag of an aeroplane called a DH2, in use with No. 32 fighter squadron. He received the Military Cross (MC) in April 1917 and by the end of the war he was in command of the crack No. 84 squadron, generally acknowledged to be one of the best such units in 1918.

While Pickthorne was airborne in the back seat of the BE2c over the Somme, Edmund Lickfold, another local boy, was also airborne as an Observer with No. 26 RFC squadron.

Edmund Richard "Erl" Lickfold was born in Sangre Grande in 1898 to English parents. As a boy he was a loner and had a very independent spirit which was fostered by his upbringing. So when at the age of seventeen he wanted to enlist in the British West Indies (BWI) Regiment to fight in the First World War, the only condition that his parents imposed before he received their consent was that he pass his Matriculation examinations. Lickfold easily accomplished this task and left Trinidad on the 16th September 1915 for England. During his tour of duty with the BWI Regiment he was stationed in Egypt and whilst there, he transferred to the newly formed Royal Flying Corps (RFC) where he went on to attain the rank of Captain. He operated the BE2c type aircraft over the East African "bush" hunting the German columns led by that redoubtable warrior Von Letow-Vorbeck. Lickfold also later qualified as a flying instructor at Abu Sueir in Egypt and went on

to achieve fame as an outstanding aerobatic pilot when he served with No. 150 squadron in Turkey. He later played a significant role as a pioneer of aviation in Trinidad.

While both Pickthorne and Lickfold were airborne as Observers in 1916, the first Trinidad and Tobago airman to qualify as a pilot took to the air. Horace Bowen, a former Queen's Royal College (QRC) boy from Port of Spain, began his pilot training in the antiquated Farman Long Horn training aircraft during May 1916. He received a posting as a combat pilot to No. 7 squadron in France on 7th July, 1916. As the captain of a BE2c, he carried out reconnaissance missions over the Somme.

Later that year, he was posted as a Staff Officer to the headquarters of the Royal Flying Corps. He ended the war as a Flight Commander with No. 105 squadron, flying the DH9 bomber.

At virtually the same time as Bowen, Frank Graham Mc Intosh, another QRC old boy from Port of Spain, qualified as a pilot. He was appointed to No. 23 squadron on 24th July, 1916, flying an FE2b bomber against tactical targets on the Somme. His flying career was cut short on 31st August of that year when flying the aircraft purchased by the people of the island of Dominica - he was shot down and seriously wounded by anti-aircraft fire. Both he and his observer were so badly wounded that the Germans repatriated them back to England, where Mc Intosh although unable to fly, rejoined his old squadron as adjutant.

While the Great War for Civilisation (as it came to be called) raged in Europe, Asia and Africa, the people of Trinidad and Tobago were fired with the

concept of early aviation to the extent that they agreed to fund the purchase of an aircraft for the RFC. A series of fund-raising events brought in enough money for the first such machine to be purchased. A BE2c, serial number A3096 was emblazoned with the name "Trinidad and Tobago Aeroplane", and was flown by the RFC in India throughout the war. The second aircraft purchased by the people of the island was an FE2b bomber, which carried the word "Trinidad" on either side of the cockpit, and was flown by No. 18 squadron until 16th July, 1916 when it was lost in *no man's land.

The Trinidad Chamber of Commerce also purchased an aeroplane for the RFC. The first was an FE2b bomber flown by No. 25 squadron until March, 1916 when it was replaced by a similar type aircraft, with the same squadron, until September of that year. The replacement machine was an RE8, which carried the name of the Chamber of Commerce. This was followed by three replacement machines of the same type until 1919. Thus throughout the aerial battles of the Great War, there were always aircraft with the name Trinidad and Tobago emblazoned on them, and they were sometimes also flown by four pilots of Trinidad and Tobago.

On 2nd January, 1918 an eighteen year old San Fernando boy became the first Trinidadian to be killed in an aircraft crash. Frank Vernon Bonyon qualified as a pilot in June, 1917 and was posted to No. 32 squadron in France during November of that year. He was flying the notoriously unstable DH5 fighter on a ground attack mission over Flanders, when the aircraft hit the ground in thick fog. He died

**no man's land – please see glossary of terms.*

shortly after being pulled from the wreckage of his aircraft.

While Bonyon flew his ground attack missions, Trinidad and Tobago's premier fighter pilot was convalescing from wounds received in air combat. Kenneth John Knaggs, another QRC old boy, had joined the RFC in August, 1916, and after his pilot training, was selected and became an outstanding fighter pilot of what became known as the anti-Richthofen squadron, flying alongside such greats as *Albert Ball, *Rhys-Davids, *Maxwell and *Cecil Lewis. In his SE5 fighter, Knaggs became one of a very select band of international fighter pilots, who manage to make a kill on their first operational mission. On his first flight during a major offensive in April 1917, he shot down a green painted Albatross fighter, over the French village of Fresnoy. The April 17th offensive which was a major achievement for the Allies was known as Bloody April, because one third of all the airmen involved died.

**Captain Albert Ball, VC, DSO and Bar MC, was the first British fighter pilot to be acknowledged as an Ace. He first flew in February 1916 and when he was killed in May 1917, he had achieved forty-seven kills.*

**Cecil Lewis along with Ball and Knaggs was one of the original pilots of No. 56 squadron. He later went on to become a founder member of the BBC, a prominent broadcaster, playwright and distinguished author.*

**Rhys-Davids was another outstanding fighter pilot of No. 56 squadron who achieved twenty-two kills before he was killed in October 1917.*

**Maxwell was another outstanding fighter pilot who flew in the same flight as Ball and Knaggs. Together with Knaggs, he also achieved a kill on his first operational flight. He was killed in May 1918.*

Knaggs also took part in the first ever large-scale aerial dogfight on 7th May, 1917 when No. 56 squadron tangled with the Richthofen flying circus on its first appearance. That evening he was flying as Albert Ball's wingman and was present when the great English ace met his death. Knaggs was one of only five survivors from No. 56 squadron, who managed to get their bullet-ridden "mounts" home to the squadron base at Vert Galant farm. In June, Knaggs was seriously wounded in air combat and sent to hospital in England. On his recovery, he was posted as a Test Pilot, but the lure of aerial combat was too strong and he managed to get himself posted back to his old squadron. He died in March 1918, during the great German offensive. He was valiantly attacking a pair of heavily armed and armoured German two seaters, when the main spar of his fighter was cut through by machine-gun fire. His aircraft's wings collapsed and the machine dived into the ground near the French village of Hamel.

All told, eighty-four Trinidad and Tobago men became involved in the world of aviation during the Great War. The war had spurred on the rapid development of aviation. Gone were the days when there was a season for flying. These daring young aviators flew in their long leather coats, leather helmets, fur lined jackets and gloves, with only a pair of goggles to protect them in their open cockpits.

They flew in the heat and dust of India, through the deserts of Arabia, to the snow covered peaks of Scotland and the Alps, and lived in the mud of Flanders. They survived in aviation's unreliable early machines and some died, that others might live.

The natural flying ability of the men from our

islands ensured that they served on every front:- Phillip Cummings from Tobago, received a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for completing one hundred night bomber missions behind enemy lines; Lindsay Grant* flew bombers in the Middle East; Desmond Pogson won his DFC for bringing home a fleet of aircraft on No. 104 squadron, in the face of a massive attack by the pilots of Richthofen's flying circus; Rupert Dunn became this country's first naval pilot; Gervais Scott was the first of many Trinidad and Tobago fighter pilots to serve at the famous Biggin Hill Fighter Station; John Bushe was shot down on a night bombing mission and captured; Percy J. Knox became a flight instructor and went on to qualify as an instructor for instructors at the School of Special Flying in Gosport, England; William Dickson was the country's first aviation technical sergeant; Alfred Horne became an air mechanic and observer; and a host of other names of very special aviators.

The First World War saw great technological advances made in the design and manufacture of aeroplanes, and the aircraft that were being flown at the end of the conflict, bore little resemblence to Schmidt's *"Red Devil"*. The only aspect of aviation that remained the same was the spirit of the aviators, they were still all pioneers. Once the war ended, the Royal Air Force (RAF) proceeded with massive demobilisation, cutting its manpower to a fraction of wartime levels and getting rid of most of its aircraft.

The majority of the Trinidad and Tobago nationals found themselves out of the military and out of

(*later to become Sir Lindsay Grant who is still alive in Trinidad today.)

work, in a world fast sliding into the Great Depression.

Civil aviation was in its infancy and jobs in that field were very few and far between. The other alternative for the former military aviators was barnstorming at fairs and exhibitions, but in Trinidad and Tobago, or even in a Caribbean context, this was virtually impossible. Their only course was to return to Trinidad and resume their former occupations. There was great war weariness in the population and even the story of the achievements of these pioneers all but died. It was to be a long time before Trinidad and Tobago aviators would fly in the islands.

Four Trinidad and Tobago aviators stayed on in military aviation. The first of these was Frank Rooks. He elected to stay in the RAF, but in 1918 he had been very badly wounded when his night bomber was riddled with anti-aircraft fire and the Air Force repatriated him to Trinidad. No amount of medical care seemed to work and he died in 1920, as a result of his terrible wounds. Horace Bowen also stayed on and by 1922, he was serving as a squadron commander in Iraq. The third Trinidad aviator was Eric Hobson, the same young man who had watched Boland's death and Schmidt's triumph in the Queen's Park Savannah.

In July 1920, he was serving with Royal Air Force No. 47 squadron flying DH9s over Somaliland. The squadron's task was to locate the desert stronghold of Mohammed bin Abdullah, known as the "Mad Mullah". On all their sweeps they had been unable to locate the rebel headquarters, until one day when Hobson's aircraft developed engine trouble. He was forced to land in the desert and together with his

observer, repaired the engine. By the time they had got the engine working and managed to take off, the rest of the squadron had disappeared and they found themselves alone over the vast open desert. Making his way back home, Hobson flew over a camouflaged encampment which he identified as the elusive stronghold of the "Mad Mullah". On the following day, he led his squadron out on a bombing mission that destroyed the desert stronghold. The "Mad Mullah" was forced to flee to Italian Somaliland, and by this time his following had been reduced to just four bodyguards, one of whom subsequently murdered him. The raid that Hobson led, ended a twenty year old war that had been characterised by murder and slavery. Eric Hobson received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his pivotal role in the proceedings.

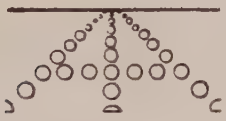
The last of the four was Claude Vincent. His flying career began in January 1918, when Edmund Lickfold was his flight instructor. After qualifying, he was appointed as personal pilot to Lawrence of Arabia, and flew the great man around the Arabian desert on his travels and combats. After the war, Vincent was appointed to No. 31 squadron serving in India, where he became involved in the Third Afghan War. He was shot down in the wild Afghan mountains while flying a Sopwith Snipe and captured by the rebels. He became one of very few comtemporary individuals who survived such an experience and was subsequently ransomed by the RAF. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and went on to further combat in Wasiristan during 1922, for which, he received a Bar to his DFC. His next appointment was as a Test Pilot at the Royal Aero Establishment, where he was involved in pushing

the frontiers of aviation outwards. Vincent was destined to become one of Trinidad and Tobago's most decorated fliers.

These three aviators, Bowen, Hobson and Vincent were to leave an indelible mark on the world of aviation, in the period when it seemed as if aeroplanes would never again come to Trinidad.

CHAPTER 2

THE ERA OF THE FLYING BOATS



The years 1919 and 1920 were a period which initiated a transition in the political and social life of the colony. It brought to the forefront men like Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani who were agitating for social change. Cipriani was labelled the champion of the black man during the war. He agitated for compensation for returning black soldiers in the same way that white soldiers in Europe were being compensated. As one of the main figures of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association Cipriani brought his qualities of leadership and charisma to the organisation, and sought to unite the masses who were mainly of African and East Indian stock.

This period was devoid of any aviation activity in Trinidad and Tobago, except for the return of many of our intrepid airmen from the First World War. Many came home telling stories of air combat and extreme danger in the air, that few of their con-

temporaries could comprehend. Except for the bicycle type flying machines of Boland and Schmidt, few who had remained in the islands could visualise the fighters, bombers, and flying boats that these aviation pioneers had flown. For the next decade, only foreigners would fly in the skies over Trinidad and Tobago as they spread aviation outwards from Europe and North America.

In the following year, 1921, the economic outlook of the colony was not at all rosy. The First World War had caused the price of both sugar and cocoa to increase dramatically, but after the war prices fell steeply. In both cases this drop was due to overproduction, and in the case of cocoa, strong competition from West Africa. Less and less foreign exchange was being earned because of the fall in demand for these two commodities, and as the oil industry was only in its infancy, the colony could not depend on that revenue to help the sagging economy.

In the same year, 1921, Trinidadians saw the arrival in the country of one the Great War's most famous aviators. British Major W.J.C. Kennedy Cochran-Patrick DSO MC and Bar, brought two flying boats to Trinidad on his way to Venezuela to carry out an oilfield survey of the Orinoco Delta and tributaries. With him were two pilots and three mechanics. Major Pat, as he was more popularly known, was well acquainted with many of the local RAF veterans and they were delighted to welcome him to Trinidad. He was the first aviator to realise the tremendous potential that Chaguaramas offered as a flying boat base and had his two crated machines moved to the Government floating dock in that area for assembly.

The first machine that was assembled was christened the "Specialist" and was first flown on 12th May, 1921. On the following day he took the Governor Lieutenant Colonel John Robert Chancellor and his ADC on a fifteen-minute flight from Port of Spain to Gasparee and back.

During the next week the Major's flying boat was often airborne as he flew dignitaries on courtesy flights and carried out his testing programme. On May 18th, he flew over the city of Port of Spain at four o'clock in the afternoon. This was the time of day when most people were leaving work and the sight of the marvellous machine sweeping gracefully around the city brought thousands onto the streets to watch. This was their first opportunity to see how far aviation had progressed since Schmidt's *"Red Devil"* of eight years before. At ten thirty on the following morning Major Pat was over the city again and once more everyone stopped what he or she was doing to watch the graceful Supermarine Channel three seater lazily floating above them.

Major Pat spent six weeks in Trinidad and during this time the second flying boat was assembled and christened the "Chaguaramas", to commemorate the magnificent operating area that he had discovered. Many years later the area was to develop into the largest flying boat base in the Caribbean. Finally, the time came to leave and at seven a.m. on 4th July he lifted off the water at Chaguaramas Bay. Twenty minutes later, the Chaguaramas was airborne and the two flying boats set course for Venezuela and their planned oilfield survey. The twenty-five year old major, who was once described as the finest pilot in the RFC, was off on a trail-blazing career. He pio-

neered aerial survey, first in South America and later in Africa. His end came in 1933 while flying a de Havilland Dragon from Johannesburg. It was a controversial crash that stunned the aviation world.

It was more than a year before the residents of Port of Spain were thrilled by the sight of another aircraft. In October 1922, the seaplane *Sampaio Correia* landed at 2.30 p.m. from Martinique, on its first flight from the United States to South America. This is the first recorded flight from the North American continent to Trinidad, but unfortunately, the aircraft sustained damage to its propellor on landing. This accident no doubt frustrated the pilots, but the ensuing delay of several weeks allowed the local residents to have, what for some was their first close up view of an aeroplane. The machine was pulled onto the slipway at the La Basse off Wrightson Road to be cleaned and have its new propellor fitted. After the departure of the *Sampaio Correia,* it was to be three long years before another aeroplane flew over the city.

The global economic situation continued to worsen during the 1920's. In Trinidad it was a period of social unrest as workers lost their jobs, prices rose, and poverty and destitution characterised the living conditions of the lower classes in society. The Trinidad Workingmen's Association, which had been dormant during the war years was revitalised, and championed the fight for social and economic justice. There followed a period of riots and strikes and the British military forces were called in to quell the unrest. In 1921 the Wood Commission which was set up to investigate general conditions in the West Indies recommended strident political reforms, and

on 7th February 1925 the first Legislative Council elections were held with the result that the Trinidad Workingmen's Association and its supporters won four out of the seven seats contested.

As the world economy slowly continued its decline into the Great Depression aviation activity continued apace. Flying boats continued to frequent the Caribbean and on 11th April 1925, the American light cruiser USS Memphis and the US Submarine VI arrived in Port of Spain for the opening and dedication of the Perry Gate at the Lapeyrouse Cemetery. The Memphis was a 6876.2 tonne (seven thousand ton) Omaha class cruiser which carried four Curtis single engine float-planes. Many locals visited the ship and had a chance to inspect the reconnaissance machines. The cruiser with its attendant submarine left the harbour on the day after the dedication of the Gate and one of its aeroplanes put on a flying display. Piloted by Lieutenant B.T. Talbot USN, the Curtis seaplane brought out thousands of people as it cruised over the city. This was the fastest flying machine yet to visit Trinidad.

Aeroplanes seemed to be visiting Trinidad only on an annual basis and the next to arrive was the Italian hydroplane "Savoia", on 10th June 1926. Bernardo Duggan and Edwardo Olivero, pilot and co-pilot had flown from Martinique in just two hours and fifty-five minutes, at an average speed of 136 km.p.h. (85 miler per hour). They spent an interesting four days in Trinidad and the sight of the aeroplane once again enthralled the local people. Once again a year went by before the next arrival, but this time three US Army flying boats were to provide an exciting spectacle.

The US military seaplanes "St. Louis", "San Francisco", and "San Antonio" under the command of Major Dargue flew in on 28th March, 1927, and landed in the Port of Spain harbour. The three machines anchored offshore and the first unscheduled air mail ever to reach Trinidad was brought ashore. The aviators were on a round-the-world flight and as such they were entertained by the Governor and the American Consul to Trinidad. On 30th March at ten o' clock in the morning, the "St. Louis" took off and circled the city, while the other two flying boats became airborne. The three Loening OA-1A amphibians formated over the city and set course for Venezuela. The departure was watched by a crowd estimated to be more than three thousand. Four days later, the Army fliers were back in Trinidad, this time with a fourth aircraft carrying mail from Venezuela. They took their final farewell on 7th April when the four machines left with mail from Grenada.

It was now just over ten years since the end of the war and aviation in Trinidad had been a very desultry affair, but all this was about to change. Trinidad was on the threshold of entering the air age, with regular air services that would link the island to the rest of the world. While this dramatic change was taking place, the three Trinidadian aviation pioneers were making a significant contribution to the wider world of aviation. Horace Bowen was station commandant of the world famous Hendon airfield, where he helped to orchestrate the renowned airshows. The 1929 show featured two hundred aircraft and coloured smoke was used for the first time to allow the spectators to follow the aerobatics. Claude Vincent was with the Royal Aero Establishment's

experimental section as one of its top test pilots. In 1929, he was flight testing the Gloster Gamecock fighter, before its entry into RAF squadron service. He was engaged in pushing the frontiers of aviation faster and higher than man had flown before. The third Trinidadian - Eric Hobson - was still in the Middle East, only now he was serving as a staff officer at the RAF sector headquarters. He was one of the planners of the world's first airlift, when more than five hundred people were airlifted out of Kabul in Afghanistan.

The year 1927 had seen a young American flier named Charles Lindbergh astonish the international aviation community by making the first solo Trans-Atlantic flight, in a single engine aircraft from New York to Paris. In the same year Pan American Airways System was formed and began operations between Key West in Florida and Cuba. Soon, Lindbergh and Pan Am came together and he was to become the pioneer of air services in the Caribbean. In July 1929 a five-man survey team arrived in Trinidad in a flying boat. They had come to look into the feasibility of operating a regular air service to Trinidad. The team flew off to British Guiana on the following day, but on 22nd July they were back. This time their seaplane made the first ever landing off San Fernando. They anchored about 100.6 metres (one hundred yards) off the small jetty and thrilled the people in the south, who had not seen a flying machine since Major Pat's overflights eight years before. When the team left Trinidad, it was to report very favourably on the ideal flying-boat operating area that existed in Trinidad at Chaguaramas.

September 1929 saw Trinidad take its place as a

destination in the world of civil aviation. Pan American Airways were going to inaugurate their Air Mail service to Trinidad and the announcement of the first arrival brought out Port of Spain's residents in force. On Monday 22nd September, crowds lined nearly 8km. (five miles) of waterfront, not so much to see the flying boat, because by now they were becoming used to the sight of them, but rather to see the world famous Charles Lindbergh. The eight passenger Sikorsky S-38 B amphibian came in over the Northern Range and circled the city before alighting in the harbour. The landing of the twin-engine aircraft registered NC 142 K was greeted with thunderous applause and this rose to a crescendo when Lindbergh handed over the first mail bag to the Post Master General, Mr. B.B. Littlepage.

On the first trip Lindbergh was accompanied by his wife and Juan Terry Trippe, the dynamic president and founder of Pan Am, as well as his co-pilot Captain Basil Rowe. After a quick turnaround the fragile looking, but rugged Sikorsky took off for British Guiana. Three days later they were back in Port of Spain. This time there were two Pan Am amphibians in the harbour. While Lindbergh, Trippe and party were accorded a reception at the Union Club, Captain J. Tilton flying the other Sikorsky amphibian NC 802 O made two courtesy flights over the city carrying prominent citizens. Before Lindbergh left on the 29th, he took the Governor and a small official party on a short flight down south over San Fernando.

Lindbergh's auspicious visit now signalled that Trinidad was linked to the rest of the world by air mail services.

Less than a week later, the seaplane "Rio de Janeiro" arrived. This flying boat took up twenty-six people, including many government officials for courtesy flights. On the same day, Dr. J.L. Pawan*, the noted Trinidad bacteriologist, left by a Pan Am aircraft for St. Kitts in connection with the outbreak of a mysterious disease that had recently been discovered in the island. Although Trinidad was not officially served by a commercial passenger service, it is probable that Dr. Pawan's flight was paid for by the Government. If this is so, then he would have been the first fare-paying passenger ever to leave Trinidad by air. On the earlier occasion, the editor of the Trinidad Guardian had been taken on a Pan Am courtesy flight to British Guiana and he would qualify as the first non fare-paying passenger to make an overseas flight from Trinidad. At the start, the Pan Am operations was purely a mail service and it would not be until 12th January, 1930, when the Pan Am seaplane NC 78 K piloted by J. Tilton brought two passengers to Trinidad, that a regular airline service was inauguared. Prior to this a large thirty-two seat flying-boat christened "Buenos Aires", registered NC 855 M had landed in Port of Spain with four passengers en route to Paramaribo in Dutch Guiana.

While Pan Am were establishing themselves as the first airline serving Trinidad, another airline had been using Port of Spain as a refuelling stop. New York Rio Buenos Aires Lines, NYRBA, flying bigger seaplanes than Pan Am, had been "transiting" the area,

*(*Dr. J.L. (M.B.E.) Pawan isolated the rabies virus which is transmitted by bats. It was the first time ever that this had been done. Dr. Pawan is honoured in medical circles worldwide.*

and official Pan Am activity in Trinidad brought about a reaction from NYRBA. In March 1930, one of their seaplanes was christened "Port of Spain" by Mrs. Grier, wife of the Acting Governor. A few days later another NYRBA seaplane took the new Governor and Lady Hollis on the first air tour of Trinidad which lasted two hours. The airline was intent on competing against Pan Am and in April, Lady Hollis christened another of their Consolidated Commodore seaplanes the "Trinidad". The aircraft carried out four flights over the city carrying a total of ninety-two passengers and the first aerial photograph of Port of Spain was taken by Trinidadian Mr. Louis Tucker.

But perhaps NYRBA's greatest contribution to early aviation was the pioneering of flight to Tobago. The first such flight was carried out by the "Port of Spain" when it landed off Plymouth in Tobago on 8th May, 1930. There were three crew members and six passengers on this first thirty-five minute Tobago flight and followed this up on 26th May by flying the Governor and Lady Hollis to Tobago for a short visit.

The NYRBA aircraft continued their Tobago flights and achieved official status when they took Governor and Lady Hollis to and from Tobago on their first official week-long visit to the island on 2nd July, 1930. NYRBA continued to make progress particularly with charter flights and air excursions not only to Tobago but also to other Caribbean islands. Pan Am were acutely aware of the progress that NYRBA were making, and with US Government backing they absorbed the smaller airline, its routes and services in September 1930. Thereafter only Pan Am flying boats came to Trinidad.

Pan American continued as the sole operator until the French concern at Piarco challenged them for a short while in 1931. Their only fatal accident during the decade of the thirties was when a seaplane on its take-off run across the harbour ran into a speedboat and three persons died. On the whole it was a remarkably safe and efficient operation especially when it is compared to the experience of the other airlines operating worldwide during the same period. In 1935, they had the honour of transporting the Duke and Duchess of Kent from Trinidad, while the battleship HMS Rodney fired a Royal Salute. In the following year, they introduced an express service that could put a passenger from Trinidad down in New York within twenty-two hours. They were the pioneers of air travel from Trinidad and the seaplane service continued well into World War II,when Piarco was in its heyday as a Naval Air Base.

Between the regular Pan Am flights, an aeroplane arrived in Port of Spain that left an indelible impression on the minds of the local residents. On 19th August 1931 at 2.15 p.m. the giant 49.1 tonne (fifty-ton) flying boat DO X landed in Port of Spain harbour. Built by Claude Dornier as the world's largest aeroplane, the DO (for Dornier) X (for unknown quantity), had twelve engines mounted back to back, on six pylons above its massive 47.8 metres (one hundred and fifty-seven foot) wing. The DO X was almost a flying pleasure dome, with dining and sleeping quarters, along with a 7 metres (twenty-three foot) Saloon, carpeted with oriental rugs. The aircraft was designed to carry seventy passengers, but on one occasion it had successfully lifted one hundred and sixty-nine. The DO X was on a trip through

the Americas to promote sales, but a sceptical public response doomed the aircraft to ending its days in the Berlin museum. It represented an idea far in advance of its time and when on the 20th August, 1931, the giant machine had lifted off, Trinidadians could claim to have seen a glimpse of the far distant future of aviation.

CHAPTER 3

THE BIRTH OF PIARCO

While Trinidad and Tobago had been treated to ten years of regular visits by seaplanes, very few landplanes had visited the islands. Seaplanes were attractive to the infant airlines operating in the Caribbean, because they did not need airfields, but the Caribbean was not the hub of the aviation world. The vast majority of aircraft operated in Europe and North America and in these places, suitable stretches of water adjacent to destinations simply were not available. This meant that aviation technology was developing much faster for landplanes and the construction of airfields was becoming a major industry in the world of aviation.

Boland and Schmidt had used the Grand Savannah in Port of Spain because it was relatively flat and above all it was easily accessible, but the Savannah had grave disadvantages. Surrounded by hills, the wind currents sweeping across it were treacherous,

and as aircraft grew bigger, the proximity of high ground could cause serious safety problems. Additionally the Queen's Park Savannah had been dedicated to public use, which meant that it could be used for a public spectacle, but not as a regular airfield. Nevertheless, some notable aviation events were still to take place at the Savannah.

Sixteen long years were to go by between Schimdt's successful 1913 flight and the landing of the next aeroplane on the Savannah. On the morning of the first of April, 1929, the tragic and controversial figure of British Captain W.W. Lancaster landed an Avro Avian on the Savannah. The Avian was a single engine biplane which had originally been built for the 1926 light aircraft competition and the type was to prove highly successful, particularly with record-breaking attempts. Bill Lancaster as he was popularly known, had left New York on 4th March, on a 16,000km. (ten thousand mile) roundtrip to South America and back via Mexico, to win a gold medal offered by Central Union Trust Corporation of the United States. The trip was also an endurance test of the aircraft's Cirrus engine. Since leaving the Air Force in 1926, Lancaster had been involved with the Avro company and the Avian. He was one of the daredevil breed of record-breakers, a man who was destined for the limelight, but Lady Luck seldom smiled on Bill Lancaster. His first attempt at a record flight to Australia ended with a series of breakdowns and it took four months to get the aircraft to its destination. While he was battling his way, Squadron Leader Bert Hinkler flying another Avian passed him and set the record.

When Lancaster first landed in Trinidad, he

brought with him the first air mail from Barbados and he was warmly welcomed by the press and public, but his luck did not hold. On 3rd April he attempted to take off but damaged the wings of the aircraft on the rough ground. His machine was towed to Neal's Garage to be repaired. Neal's garage was later to merge with Massy's establishment to become the giant Neal and Massy Corporation of today with its headquarters in Trinidad and Tobago. After the repairs, Lancaster took off on a test flight on 6th April, which confirmed that the aircraft was ready for the second half of its long gruelling trek. That test flight was the second successful flight by a landplane from Trinidad. On the following morning attempting a take-off, Lancaster crashed and destroyed the Avian. He was pulled from the wreck suffering from shock and slight injuries and had to spend a week recuperating before leaving Trinidad, minus his aeroplane. The crash caused considerable controversy at the time from a variety of sources, few of whom were qualified to judge. Some claimed that the treacherous air currents had caused it, while others blamed Lancaster for staying out too late the previous night.

Despite the failure of Lancaster's flight, or perhaps because of it, members of the City Council began discussing a possible site for an aerodrome. On the broader front the British government were considering plans to federate the West Indies in an effort to cut administrative costs. The West Indies Conference held in Barbados had formed a West Indies Aviation Committee in January 1929 and in April they proposed an air link between Barbados, Trinidad and British Guiana, but at this stage neither the aircraft,

the finance nor the airfields existed to bring this proposal to fruition. However, the French Consul to Trinidad took up the idea and began making enquiries about the feasibility of someone linking the territories by air. This first initiative in 1929 was probably the first stirring of an idea which was in time to lead to the birth of Piarco airport. In the meantime, the City Council pursued the idea of a permanent Port of Spain flying field. On 2nd August, Mayor Johnston asked the Pan Am officials to advise on a possible area close to the city, that could be developed for flying machines. This led on 29th August to the land at Mucurapo being reserved for the setting up of a flying field. The piece of land lay south of the Mucurapo Cemetery with its eastern boundary on the Maraval River. The first civil aviation regulations had been promulgated in 1919 and if Trinidad was going to have a flying field, as well as regular flying boat services, the country would need an official body to control aviation.

Early in 1930, the Air Board was created and the Colonial Secretary was appointed Chairman, with the Inspector General of Constabulary, the Attorney General, the Collector of Customs, the Deputy Colonial Secretary and the Harbour Master as members. The Harbour Master was also designated as Registrar of Aircraft. Trinidad and Tobago now had their official machinery set up and at the start of the new decade there was talk of both French and German aircraft operating to the island.

Before the first airline operating landplanes could begin its services, the Queen's Park Savannah still had a small part to play in aviation. On 30th January 1930, the ship the RMS Alcantara arrived in Port of

Spain harbour, with three hundred and fifty-four tourists. Among them was a Major Nathan, who had a de Havilland Moth light aircraft being carried on the ship. He took the opportunity to get in a flight and had his machine transported to the Savannah, where on the 31st he carried out a flying demonstration. Then in September "Goodwill Fliers" in a Stinson Detroiter, registered NR4874, flew over Trinidad. They landed on the 6th September at Union Park in San Fernando, to become the very first aviators to land in San Fernando. On the eighth, they flew to Port of Spain and landed at 7.30 a.m. on the Queen's Park Savannah. Two days later they were off, but they did not make it back to the United States. Some time later the aircraft crashed in the Bahamas, and fortunately both pilots escaped injury.

Between Major Nathan's pleasure flight and the visit of the "Goodwill Fliers", the Piarco airport project was born. On Friday 29th August 1930, a French four-passenger Latécoère aircraft registered FAJGE, landed on the Queen's Park Savannah bringing Mr. Paul Vachet and his wife. The aircraft pilot was a Mr. M. Roger and also aboard was Mr. José Acquatella, who was Chief Mechanic of the airline Compagnie Générale Aeropostale. As well as being a pilot of considerable experience Vachet was the Director in charge of the Venezuela, West Indies and the Guianas division. He had come to sign agreements and finalise plans for the building of an airfield, which would allow the Compagnie Générale Aeropostale to operate into Trinidad. The French Consul to Trinidad, Mr. Prignault, had been holding discussions with a local cocoa plantation owner Maurice Lange about the location and construction of an airstrip.

The Savannah in Port of Spain was out of the question and the projected City Council airfield at Mucurapo had no room for development and they were then forced to look elsewhere. There was ample flat land between the northern and central ranges, but most of it was either swamp, thickly forested or cultivated. The exception was the open Piarco Savannah, which in its natural state seemed ideal for a flying field. After careful consideration, approval was sought to convert the area into an airfield. The Government of the day was anxious to have Trinidad linked to the other territories by landplanes and they gave the go-ahead for the use of Crown land.

On Vachet's arrival, he was taken to see the Piarco Savannah which Maurice Lange had chosen. The final decision on the suitability of the area was to be made by Vachet. Lange knew the area well since he came from an old French Creole family in San Rafael who were cocoa plantation owners. Like his father Maurice Lange attended St. Mary's College before continuing on to France to pursue further studies at a Jesuit College called the Collège de Tivoli in Bordeaux.

After completing his education he returned to Trinidad to look after the family estates, but the fortunes of cocoa were at an all time low (prices fell and crops were attacked by witches broom disease), so Lange soon had to look for other means of supplementing his income. He was not a civil engineer, and had no academic qualifications in that field, but he had what his son "Noche" Lange described as "a natural born talent". Maurice Lange had previously provided the government with sleepers for the railway, and the building of the airstrip at Piarco was to be another of his engineering feats.

Although the Piarco Savannah was a good 25.6km. (sixteen miles) from Port of Spain, it was fairly accessible since the Golden Grove Road which crossed the areas gave access to the Eastern Main Road, and thus to the city, but this was not the primary concern of the surveyors. The savannah was also prone to flooding and indeed many parts of it were always under water, sometimes even too deep for the planting of rice. This problem did not deter the French and after considerable deliberation Vachet gave his approval for the site. It was an inspired decision, by a group of men who could see the future of aviation, because above all other considerations, Piarco had a vast potential for development. These men were confident that Maurice Lange could drain the area and with the dream of a much greater world of aviation in mind, they chose the finest airfield site in the entire Caribbean. Piarco turned out to be a pilot's dream airfield. Lange had used the technical knowledge possessed by many of Trindiad's First World War aviators, combined with his estate engineering know-how, to pick a site that would allow an unimpeded approach and departure flight path, with air safety as the primary consideration. Vachet recognised the area's potential and was pleased to give his approval for the start of the project.

Maurice Lange was given the contract to build the flying field and work started on Monday 1st September 1930. He set to work with the help of his chief foreman Maurice Alexis, and assistant Tony McKenzie using a combination of hired labour and earth-moving equipment. He became one of the first persons in Trinidad to use this type of equipment on such a project. Three days later, Vachet and party

took off from the area north of the cemetery in the Queen's Park Savannah, confident that the right decision had been made. Lange began by draining the area. This was easily accomplished because of the proximity of the Caroni River to the south. Then a strip of east-west savannah, 914.6 metres (three thousand feet) long, was dug up and a foundation of rocks and gravel laid. Over this he spread a bed of turf and planted grass. The job took only three months, yet the foundation that Lange laid under the first 914.6 metres (three thousand feet) is still the basic bed on which the present runway threshold lies.

Maurice Lange went on to other engineering projects including the St. Andrews Golf Course in Maraval, but always maintained an interest in the Piarco airfield.

The old Golden Grove Road ran from the present Oropune village location in a south-easterly direction towards Piarco and St. Helena villages to the south and the eastern boundary of the flying field rested on the edge of the road. Lange constructed a two-storied building for the airline north of the flying field alongside the road, in the area that today lies east of the Light Aeroplane Club hangar. There was no pipe-borne water supply and a well was sunk adjacent to the airline terminal and water was pumped from the well to a tank on top of the building. Alongside the building, the Shell Oil Company put in an underground fuel tank with a hand pump and hose for re-fuelling the aircraft.

Although Piarco was Crown land, the maintenance of the flying field was to be the responsibility of the French airline and prior to the first flight, they set up their ground handling organisation. Mr. George de

Verteuil was to be the Compagnie Générale Aeropostale's first Trinidad manager. Carl Agostini, who in later years was to become both a pilot and the first Trinidadian Director of Civil Aviation, was the airline's first office clerk. Living just to the north of the new airport terminal, Mr. Sahadeo and Mrs. Biptee became the airline's aircraft handler and cleaner.

The airline had originally been conceived by French industrialist and aircraft manufacturer Pierre Latécoère, whose dream was to open up the West African route and then connect with South America. He pioneered the West African leg, but as the South American connection was about to be made, he was ousted as Chief Executive by the wealthy French banker Marcel Lafont, who gave the airline the name of Compagnie Générale Aeropostale. Latécoère at least had the consolation of knowing that when the airline opened up South America, the aircraft they used were manufactured by him. When the French airline decided to add Trinidad to their network, it virtually linked the island to Europe, but few people realised that the French concern was seriously overextended and all but bankrupt. Nevertheless Trinidadians waited expectantly for the first airline operations to begin.

When eventually Mr. Vachet landed at Piarco and had an opportunity to inspect the completed flying field, he wrote a letter of commendation to Maurice Lange, expressing his satisfaction with the planning and construction of the airport. In fact he singled out the foundation works as being among the best of the thirty-four airports that the airline operated throughout Latin America. Lange, Vachet and Prignault, along with their technical advisers, chose a

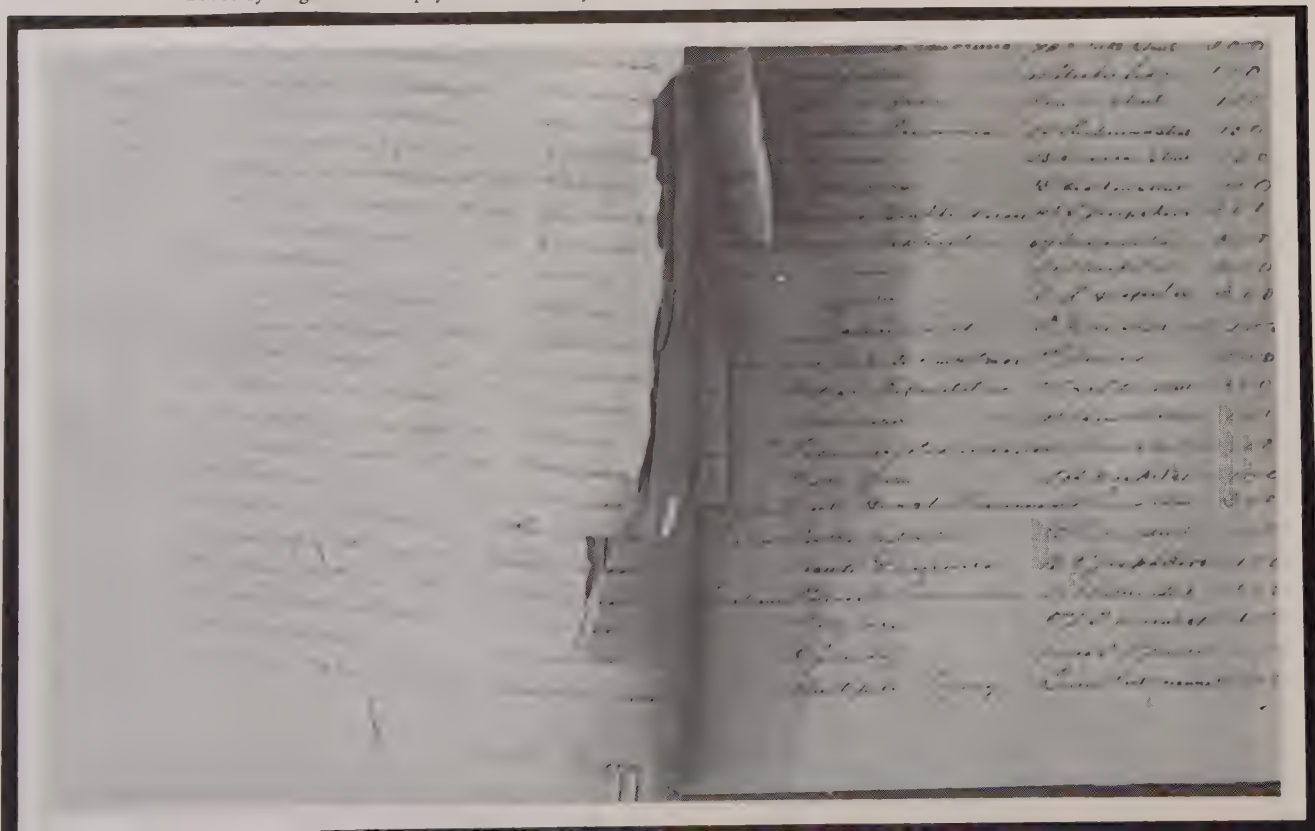
site that was to make Trinidad a major hub of the Caribbean aviation world in years to come. Now they awaited the coming of the first aeroplane.

Plates

1913 – 1930

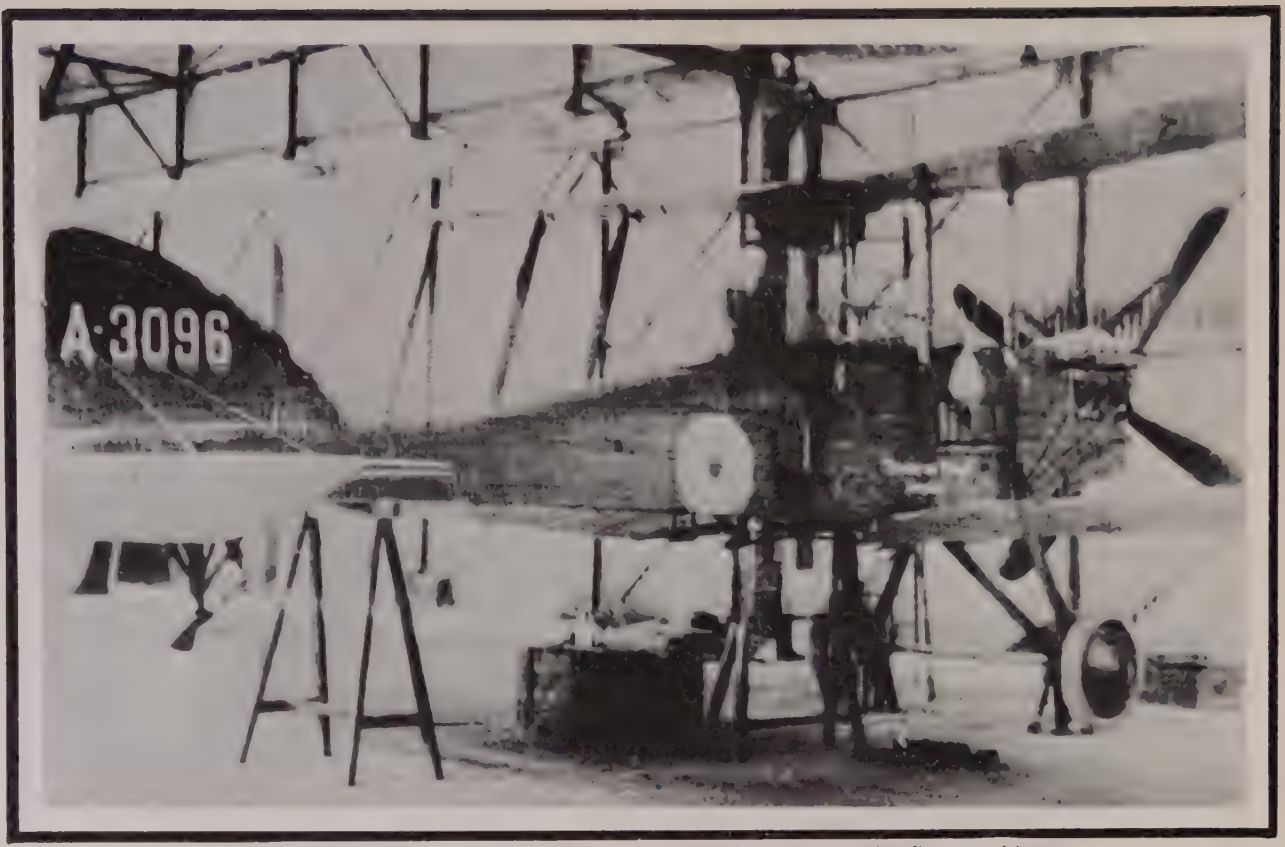
Frank Boland's Biplane in the Savannah, 1913. Michael Anthony's Collection.

Registration of Frank Boland's interment of Lapeyrouse Cemetery on 24th January, 1913.
Courtesy Registrar of Lapeyrouse Cemetery.



Jose Solis behind wheel of "Red Devil" in 1913.
Courtesy Eric Solis.

Edmund "Earl" Lickfold (foreground) in 1916. Courtesy Hilary Correia nee Lickfold.



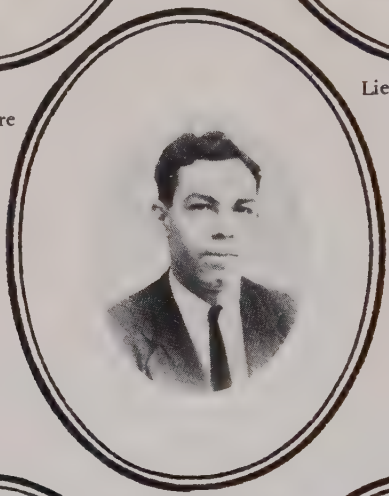
Aircraft donated by the people of Trinidad and Tobago during the first World War.

Kenneth John Knaggs, alongside his SE5 Fighter, 21st April, 1917
G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection.

Tombstone of Kenneth J. Knaggs.
Courtesy the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Lieutenant
George de Boissiere
Royal Air Force

Lieutenant Louis E. Prada
Lancashire Regt.
Attached RAF



Cadet Jose Rodrigues
Royal Air Force

Lieutenant Roland de Verteuil
Royal Air Force

Lieutenant Marc de Verteuil
Royal Air Force

Photographs taken from C.I.C. Annual 1919, on permission from Fr. de Verteuil.

Flight Commander Horace Bowen
Royal Air Force

Lieutenant Jules de Rochemont
Royal Air Force

Lieutenant Edmund O'Connor
Royal Air Force

Lieutenant Eugene O'Connor
Royal Air Force

Photographs taken from C.I.C. Annual 1919, on permission from Fr. de Verteuil.

The R.A.F. memorial at Queen's Royal College.
Photograph Lloyd Pierre Jr.

Pan Am Strato Clipper at Piarco on the 2nd August 1920. Courtesy Trinidad Guardian.

U.S. Army Loening OA-1A Amphibian at anchor 077, Port of Spain, in May 1927
Courtesy Sally May, Pan Am.

Bill Lancaster's Avro Avian, 1929 in the Queen's Park Savannah. Courtesy Lulworth Punch.

Wreckage of Bill Lancaster's Avro Avian, April 1929.
Courtesy Mr. Punch.

Cocorite 1929 seen from left to right:
Mr. Laughlin – Chief Preventative Officer, U.S. Army Pilot, British Army Officer, Colonel May. Courtesy Sally May of Pan Am who also identified the figures in the photo.

Pan Am Sikorsky S38B leaving Cocorite ramp in 1930. Courtesy Sally May, Pan Am

Pan Am Sikorsky S38B on point of take off, Cocorite 1930 Courtesy Sally May, Pan Am

Pan Am flying boat off Cocorite. Michael Anthony's Collection

The D.O.X. at Port of Spain Harbour in August 1930. Courtesy Gerard Besson.

Compagnie Générale Aeropostale Latécoère single engine aircraft in the Savannah in 1930.
Courtesy Hélène Farfan.

CHAPTER 4

THE PIONEERING THIRTIES

The opening of Piarco Airport was a gala affair and the extensive press build-up to the first flight ensured that a considerable number of people took the long trek to the airfield. On 8th January 1931, the Compagnie Générale Aeropostale's first aircraft registered F-Adjl-M touched down to the thunderous applause of the more than five thousand people present for the occasion. The Latécoère piloted by Paul Vachet and a co-pilot Lemoine became the first aeroplane to land at Piarco, when its wheels touched the grass at 4.50 p.m., that historic afternoon. The machine had taken two hours and twenty-five minutes, bringing six passengers and five bags of mail from Ciudad Bolivar in Venezuela. The aeroplane was met on arrival by George de Verteuil, Maurice Lange and the French Consul, who led Vachet and co-pilot and the passengers to the official enclosure, near the terminal. The French company was linking Trinidad and Venezuela

with a passenger and mail service, allowing passengers to travel to the South American continent and ultimately to Europe by air. Governor and Lady Hollis were present leading the invitees, and in his welcoming speech, Sir Claude said that he looked forward to the day when passengers would be able to travel by air from Trinidad to France in just four and a half days. The official speeches were followed by a reception and on the following day, the aircraft took off for Venezuela.

Piarco International Airport was now a reality. The airfield was excellent, the aircraft and crew of the French airline were capable, the ground access to Piarco although not perfect was acceptable, but where were the passengers? After the initial novelty of the service had worn off, the passenger loads began to decline. With Pan American flying boats operating regularly, virtually from Port of Spain, few people bothered to make the long trip to Piarco to go abroad. At this time it became apparent that the French Company was also experiencing difficulties on all its other South American routes and it was not long before doubts began to be expressed about the commerical viability of the project. Vachet was forced to suspend the service to Piarco, leaving the maintenance of the airfield to Maurice Lange, and not long after this decision was made the whole network folded up and the South American Branch of the Compagnie Générale Aeropostale was forced into liquidation. General Gomez, the President of Venezuela bought over the company's assets and today part of the original name survives in Linea Aeropostal Venezolana, and the airline still flies many of the French company's original routes. The West African

section of the airline was one of five companies that merged in 1933 to form the giant Air France.

The terminal used by the Compagnie Générale Aeropostale was dismantled and sold, but by this time there was another smaller shed immediately to the west of it which belonged to the then emerging local aviation great Mikey Cipriani. Like his namesake Arthur Andrew Cipriani, he was to leave an indelible mark on local history. "Marvellous Mikey", born in 1890, had been an athlete, a champion cyclist and footballer and a very popular and well known personality. When the First World War started Mikey put aside his sporting activities and sailed for Europe where he joined the Second Life Guards. After the war he became a solicitor and set up a thriving practice in Port of Spain. In 1928, with encouragement from his wife Daisy, Mikey had gone off to England and been bitten by the flying bug. He qualified for a British private pilot's licence at the de Havilland flying school and decided to buy an aeroplane for use in Trinidad. On his return, a mutual friend, Percy Hosten, introduced him to the veteran First World War pilot Edmund Lickfold.

Cipriani commissioned Lickfold to provide the technical know-how and the flying experience, while Cipriani financed and managed the venture. Lickfold went off to Canada and took delivery of the aeroplane, a de Havilland Moth registered G-CAVW, which he test flew, and at the same time renewed his pilot's and instructor's licence. The aircraft was shipped to Trinidad and Lickfold assembled it at Piarco. Lickfold later obtained the first engineer's licence to be issued in Trinidad and Tobago.

The arrival of the first aeroplane to be owned by a

Trinidadian created quite a stir and local newspapers kept the public informed of Cipriani and Lickfold's activities at Piarco. On Thursday 17th September 1931, a Trinidad Guardian article headlined "Airplane for a Local Pioneer" stated that the Moth airplane ordered by Mr. Michael Cipriani had arrived the previous day by the Canadian National Liner s.s. Chomedy at St. Vincent Wharf, Port of Spain. On completion of customs formalities the aircraft was taken by lorry to the Piarco Savannah. At Piarco the case was broken open and the delicate parts (wings, propellers and floats) were placed under the offices of the Compagnie Générale Aeropostale. Commenting on the purchase "Erl" Lickfold said, "The chief idea of Mr. Cipriani ordering this Moth airplane is to foster aviation in Trinidad, he intends as well to use it for commercial purposes".

Lickfold assembled the airplane in two days and on Saturday 19th September 1931 it was ready for its first flight from Trinidad soil. According to another Guardian report, "after the plane had been assembled by Mr. Lickfold, Mr. Cipriani thoroughly examined it and the engine was tested out on the ground". He (Lickfold) then proceeded to the western end of the airbase and took off in an easterly direction. He started off at 3.30 p.m. and after cruising around for about 15 minutes a perfect landing was made. Mr. Lickfold attained a height of 609.7 metres (2,000 feet) and flew at a speed of 144km. p.h. (90 miles) per hour."

Immediately after the historic first flight, at about 4.00 p.m., Lickfold took up Cipriani and his wife Daisy on the second and third flights respectively.

Later on in an interview with the Guardian Cipriani

explained the motives behind his pioneering aviation efforts. "My main object", he said, "is to encourage flying in the island and to demonstrate what a safe and easy means of transport it is. This airplane was put together by Mr. Lickfold and myself. Mr. Lickfold is a most competent man and knows his job thoroughly. He learnt how to rig an airplane in the Royal Air Force where he had already flown for 544 hours."

On the first of October, Mikey Cipriani invited Lady Hollis to come to Piarco and christen Trinidad's first aeroplane the "Humming Bird". Following the ceremony, Lickfold put on Piarco's first ever aerobatic display. He was a master of the art and indeed it is recorded that while he was serving with the RAF in 1919, he astonished his colleagues by looping a Sopwith Camel fighter under a bridge in Budapest. His scintillating flying that day at Piarco, kept the crowd of spectators on the edge of their seats. During the course of the following year, he was to present several of these aerobatic displays and each time Piarco resounded to the cheers of the crowd, as they watched the expertise of this outstanding Trinidadian pilot.

The arrangement between Cipriani and Lickfold was that they would attempt to make the aeroplane pay for itself and on 1st October they advertised that it was available for joyriding, flying lessons and use by commercial concerns. In the first year's operation, the machine logged one hundred and twenty pleasure flights and the list of passengers read like a who's who of old-time Trinidad. A notable name on the list was that of Cecelia Bambury who was then 92 years of age. One of the first things that had to be accom-

plished was the renewal of Cipriani's licence, which had lapsed. Mikey Cipriani became the first Trinidadian to receive flying instruction at Piarco and Lickfold was the first flight instructor. However, to Harold Hobson, cousin of Squadron Leader Eric Hobson, must go the honour of being Piarco's first pupil pilot. His first flying lesson with Lickfold was on 2nd October 1931 and he went on to pass his flying exams on 12th March 1932, receiving the first pilot's licence to be issued in Trinidad and Tobago.

In between the frequent aerobatic displays, instructional flights and joyriding, the aeroplane was used on a number of trail-blazing first flights. Lickfold and Cipriani became the first locals to land in San Fernando when they touched down at Skinner Park on 24th October. Three days later they took off to meet Squadron Leader Hinkler. Bert Hinkler was flying a light aircraft from the United States down to Brazil and then across the South Atlantic and in the course of his flight he became the first airman to complete a solo crossing of the Caribbean. He was a well-known aviation pioneer and his South Atlantic attempt was being closely followed by the world's press. Lickfold and Cipriani intercepted Hinkler's de Havilland Puss Moth "Karohi" over the Grand Bocas and they escorted him across Port of Spain, to Piarco where they were met by Piarco's builder Maurice Lange. Hinkler went on to achieve the South Atlantic crossing, but was killed two years later when his aircraft flew into the Alps.

On 5th November 1931, the pair made the first aircraft landing in Arima and later that day Lickfold took up the Town Clerk for a courtesy flight from the Arima Savannah.

Except for the occasional flying boat, aeroplanes were rarely seen over Tobago and both men were keen to see the island from the air. Tobago did not have a flying field, and they were forced to settle for an overflight, which they accomplished on 2nd November 1931. The crossing from Piarco was carried out at 2743.9 metres (nine thousand feet), to ensure that in the event of trouble, the machine could safely glide to land. They flew around Tobago and returned to Piarco one hour and fifty minutes later. This flight lit the spark that was to eventually take Cipriani's life.

The fact that Trinidad had its own aeroplane was well established throughout the Caribbean and invitations began coming in to bring the machine to the various islands. A great deal of planning went into their first overseas flight. On 29th July 1932, almost a year since the pair had commenced operations at Piarco, they took off at 5.52 a.m. for the island of St. Vincent. They flew over Grenada and touched down in St. Vincent at 8.10 a.m. to a tumultous welcome having carried out the first overseas flight in the Caribbean by West Indian aviators. They were entertained at a reception that evening and took off on the following morning for the island of Barbados. Once again, on arrival at Rockley, they were accorded a magnificent welcome and entertained by the Governor. On the following day Lickfold took up the "Humming Bird" and carried out the first aerobatic display over Barbados, thrilling the large crowd with his mastery of the art. On 2nd August 1932, he took off from Rockley and carried out the first solo intra-Caribbean flight by a Trinidadian, when he brought the "Humming Bird" home to Piarco. That

flight is believed to be the first solo flight made by a West Indian between two islands of the Caribbean and Lickfold landed at Manzanilla Beach after a particularly difficult and hazardous flight. Cipriani and Lickfold never flew together again and that final adventure ended Lickfold's outstanding contribution to early aviation. However, Edmund Lickfold was to live a long and full life. He worked for several firms in Trinidad and Tobago, and is well remembered by those who served under him during his years as an overseer with Caroni Ltd. He died in April 1983.

With the ending of the Cipriani/Lickfold arrangement, Frank "Jack" St. Hilaire, another Trinidadian who was to make a mark in Trinidad's aviation history, became the "Humming Bird's" mechanic. St. Hilaire was only a young boy of eighteen at the time but already had some aviation experience gleaned while working with NYRBA and later with Pan Am.

Cipriani felt that Piarco was too far away from Port of Spain and on 16th October 1932, he flew the "Humming Bird" to the Port of Spain Savannah, where the machine was dismantled and taken to his house. The engine was sent off to the manufacturers for overhaul and the machine was thoroughly checked. By this time, Cipriani had changed the aircraft's registration to VP-TAA - Trinidad's first. When he resumed flying in 1933, it was from the Mucurapo flying field, near to his Woodbrook home. The aeroplane became a familiar sight over Port of Spain and in October 1933 Cipriani and St. Hilaire escorted the giant German airship, Graff Zepplin, when it crossed Trinidad on its way from Pernambuco in Brazil to Miami. During this period of time Cipriani also flew his wife to Grenada, at the invitation of the

Governor of the island. He had a dream of linking the Caribbean islands by air and was anxious to make the first landing in Tobago.

On Sunday 3rd June 1934 at 8.10 a.m. Cipriani took off from the Mucurapo flying field in an attempt to fly to Tobago and land at Shirvan Park. Accompanying him was twenty-four year old Englishman Leslie Bradshaw. Cipriani was also taking three carrier pigeons which were to be released from Tobago, and the Sunday issue of the Trinidad Guardian.

The weather that day was not good. Visibility was very poor and with limited instruments, he lost his way and flew into the mountains of the Northern Range. When at 11.00 a.m. the plane had not yet arrived at Shirvan Park, officials there wired Trinidad, and a massive search was immediately mounted. According to newspaper reports, a Pan American airplane, a Colombian destroyer, fleets of motor cars, and hundreds of policemen and civilians combed the Northern Range and the sea coast looking for the missing fliers.

The wreckage of the aircraft was finally found by Nathaniel Archer, a hunter, on 11th June in the dense forest of El Chiquero. The carrier pigeons had also perished. Port of Spain, and indeed people throughout Trinidad who had now become accustomed to the familiar sight of the "Humming Bird" flying over their villages and towns, were saddened to learn the fate of their beloved intrepid aviator.

The death of forty-three year old Mikey Cipriani, sportsman, solicitor, aviator, was a shock to all. He had always loved spectacle and his funeral on 12th June 1934 contributed to one of Port of Spain's

most tumultous of such events. It was reported that more than 12,000 persons from all parts of Trinidad marched in the double funeral procession and about 8,000 more lined the streets. Cipriani and Bradshaw were buried side by side at the Mucurapo Cemetery, about 274.3 metres (300 yards) from the airfield where nine days before they had left on their ill-fated journey.

Glowing tribute was paid to Michael Cipriani. He was the first Trinidad and Tobago aviation entrepreneur and the first to die while piloting an aircraft over his country. Sadly he died without seeing his dream of a national airline come to fruition. On 24th July 1937 Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani, Deputy Mayor of Port of Spain, officiated at the unveiling of a memorial in honour of Mikey Cipriani. The monument still stands today at Cipriani's grave in Mucurapo.

After Cipriani moved VP-TAA out of Piarco in 1932, the airfield was left deserted for a number of years. During this time Mucurapo Field held centre stage, mainly because it was so easily accessible to the public. There was much criticism of Piarco's location and indeed in 1935, both the Legislative Council and the Port of Spain City Council held discussions about creating another airport site. These discussions centred around using Mucurapo Field, or creating an airport in the Laventille swamp. The cost of the Laventille Swamp project was prohibitive, but that location remained a major consideration till the mid-1940's.

Mucurapo Field, had little or no potential for development. Some believed the area was not suited to aviation and posed a danger to aircraft and residen-

tial areas. This school of thought gained credence after the "Goodwill Fliers" crashed in December 1934. For the first time fliers of African descent had arrived in Trinidad. Two black American fliers - Forsythe and Anderson - known as the "Goodwill Fliers", arrived at Mucurapo Field in an aircraft christened the "Booker T. Washington" and were accorded a civic reception by the City Council. However, on 14th December 1934, when the American fliers attempted a take-off, the aircraft struck a clump of bamboo and crashed into a backyard in Taylor Street, Woodbrook, destroying their machine.

Mucurapo Field continued to be used right through the Second World War, but the growth of aviation and the area's development as a residential area doomed the site to extinction.

In the mid-thirties, Maurice Lange replied to criticism of his choice of Piarco's location by saying that "aviation is in its infancy, and the time will come when the selection would be fully appreciated, because aircraft will get bigger, heavier and faster and will require more and more space, away from built up areas." It was a prophetic statement and the arrival of the jet age proved how right he was, but in the 1930's Piarco was deserted, waiting for its rebirth. Only a few intrepid aviators who visited Trinidad during these quiet years confirmed the fact that Piarco was a pilot's airfield.

The 1930's - the turbulent thirties as they were also called - saw a social transformation in the history of the colony. Women were stepping into the limelight. In 1936 Audrey Jeffers became the first woman to be elected to the Port of Spain City Council thereby ending the traditional male dominance that was

then the norm in local politics. Women like Elma Francois and Daisy Crick were also instrumental in the formation of social organisations such as trade unions and many started to make a valuable contribution to their society. On the aviation front women were also making their mark.

One of Piarco's first visitors turned out to be the pioneer female aviator Laura Ingalls. She arrived on 17th April 1934, flying a Lockheed Vega, having made the journey from Paramaribo in Dutch Guiana. Pan American Airways were her hosts and they arranged for the grass to be cutlassed at Piarco before her arrival. She was met by Mr. Robert Woodburn Chief Engineer of Pan Am. Later on a maintenance check on her aircraft revealed that the central gasolene tank located in the fuselage had been damaged and was leaking its contents into the aeroplane. This required major repair and maintenance work and she spent two days in Trinidad while Mr. Toolsie of Pan Am repaired the leak.

The next visitor to Piarco was the Cuban aviator Lieutenant Antonio Mendez y Relaez who touched down in January 1936.

Once again Pan Am were the hosts who prepared the field for his arrival. A year later, Pan Am were again hosts to visiting aviators when in November four aeroplanes landed at Piarco and created quite a stir. One from the Dominican Republic and three from Cuba were the guests of Pan Am, following the by now well established practice of landing at Piarco. Visits by these occasional aeroplanes were few and far between, but in the year 1938 dramatic changes occurred at Piarco.

Piarco was on the threshold of its rebirth. The

decade of the pioneering thirties had seen the development of a range of superb landplanes, which naturally led to the decline of the expensive seaplanes and although Pan Am were continuing their operations at Cocorite, it would not be long before they also abandoned the seaplane in favour of the popular landplanes. The world of civil aviation was changing and as more people chose air transportation as a means of travel more inland airfields were established. Eventually, to most countries an aviation programme meant the development of inland airfields.

October 1938 saw the arrival of KLM, Royal Dutch Airlines the world's oldest airline, still operating under its original name. KLM had begun operations in 1919, linking European cities, and had then pioneered its Far East routes, before commencing Caribbean operations in 1938. The first KLM airliner into Piarco was a Fokker FXII Super Trimotor, piloted by the Dutch captain André de la Porte. These twelve-passenger, all metal machines, powered by three BMW engines had been designed specifically for KLM by the famed Dutchman Anthony Fokker, who had firmly established his name during the First World War as an aircraft designer with German military aviation.

When the first flight arrived at Piarco, the field was virtually deserted and suffering from seven years of neglect. KLM were obliged to use the Pan Am radio service until 1939, when they were able to establish their own at Piarco. They developed a four times weekly air service to the new Seawell airport in Barbados, as well as a twice weekly service to Curacao and a weekly flight to Paramaribo in Dutch Guiana.

But there were operational problems at Piarco aerodrome. Over the years, the drains had filled up and sometimes in the rainy season the savannah would flood, making it unusable. In 1939, flooding forced the KLM service to be suspended for one month and Mr. L.E. des Iles, the assistant warden of St. George County, under whose charge Piarco fell, was forced to approach the government for funds to renovate the airfields.

The Piarco Aerodrome had first been built and maintained by the French. In the mid-thirties, Pan Am had done occasional maintenance for specific flights, but it was not until the arrival of KLM that the Government of Trinidad took charge of the airport. The foundation and drainage system installed by Lange was still substantially sound, but in the rainy season water on the muddy surface of the flying field could stop all operations and the Government called in Eugene de la Rosa of its Public Works Department to upgrade the airport. The sum of two hundred thousand dollars was allocated to the project and with this they began paving the 914.6 meters (three thousand feet) runway. KLM put up a terminal alongside the Golden Grove Road and continued to operate from this area until the Government opened up the south side of the airport in 1940. The airfield was on the threshold of a major reconstruction and organisation, its oldest inhabitant the Light Aeroplane Club (LAC) was being formed.

As far back as February 1934, at an RAF reunion dinner attended by thirty-two of Trinidad and Tobago's First World War aviators, it was established that there were at least fifty former pilots living in the colony who were keen to fly again. At the dinner,

they chose a committee of four to look into the possibility of forming a flying club. The committee comprised Sir Selwyn Grier, Mr. A. Ruthven-Murray, Major Alan Storey DFC, Mr. A. Webb and Mr. Wilfred Alston. The committee reported that the club would require at least two aircraft and that as Trinidad and Tobago were just emerging from the world trade depression, they could not hope to finance the project without Government financial assistance. Government, they were to discover, could not justify the expenditure unless the activities of the proposed club could be tied into national defence, but in 1934 there could be no justification for this. The idea of the flying club had to be held in abeyance, but the committee did indicate that as Mucurapo was unsuitable for flight training, Piarco would have to be the central flying field.

Three years later, Cipriani's former mechanic Frank "Jack" St. Hilaire, now a pilot, was drawing up plans for the formation of a flying club and advised that he was purchasing an aircraft for himself. On 8th December, 1937 St. Hilaire's aircraft registered VP-TAB as Trinidad and Tobago's second aeroplane, arrived in the island. St. Hilaire found that although there were two hundred people interested in the project, the club remained only in the planning stage. This was primarily because the project could not get off the ground without Government backing, but this was soon to change.

In the meantime, St. Hilaire made an attempt to follow in the footsteps of Mikey Cipriani by flying his aircraft VP-TAB to Tobago.

On 3rd June 1938, four years after Cipriani's death, St. Hilaire took off from the abandoned Piarco

airfield, but experienced an engine failure at 91.4 metres (300 feet) and crashed. After one year of repair work and preparations, St. Hilaire once again attempted to make the Tobago flight on the anniversary of Cipriani's death. However, bad weather conditions forced a postponement to the following day. On 4th June 1939, in good weather, St. Hilaire took off in VP-TAB and the air route to Tobago was finally conquered. While en route, he dropped a wreath over the valley where Cipriani had crashed and then landed at Shirvan Park in Tobago.

Late in 1937, Governor Sir Hubert Young KCMG DSO arrived in Trinidad. He was an aviation enthusiast, but more importantly, his wife, Lady Young was a pilot of considerable experience. She brought her influence to bear and set out to make the idea of a flying club a reality. On Tuesday, 15th November 1938, she called a public meeting at QRC to discuss the setting up of the proposed club. Sir Hubert was ill in Tobago and could not attend, but a message from him was read out, which indicated that he would be prepared to give the club Government backing. The large and enthusiastic audience backed a proposal by Mr. Ruthven-Murray that the club be called the Light Aeroplane Club of Trinidad and Tobago, and the LAC was well on its way to becoming a reality. The first management committee was elected that evening and was composed of Lady Young, Mr. A. Murray, Sqn. Ldr. A. Hamel-Smith, Sqn. Ldr. G. Wright, Major Alan Storey, DFC, Capt. A. Essex, Mr. Frank St. Hilaire, Mr. E. Bearden, and Mr. C. Hitchins. Sir Hubert Young and Captain Arthur Cipriani were elected as the Club's first life members and this was followed by the enrolment of

the first ordinary members.

By April of 1939, the LAC was able to show that it was a properly organised body and on the 21st, the Government Finance Committee was able to recommend the necessary financial assistance for the Club. The indefatigable Lady Young went off to England and arranged with the Air Ministry for the purchase of two Tiger Moths at Royal Air Force rates. In the meantime, World War Two had started, lending great urgency to the plans of the LAC. It was registered as a limited liability company on 13th October 1939, and held its first annual general meeting on 2nd December 1939. Both the LAC and Piarco airport were now on the threshold of a dramatic experience.

CHAPTER 5

1940

As the year 1940 opened, the expansion and modernisation plans at Piarco were in full swing. The main east-west runway numbered 09 and 27 was paved, with taxiways to the ramp. The Administration building which was made of wood on a concrete base had been completed on the south side of the runway and KLM moved their office to this area. To the southwest of the Administration block, the new Light Aeroplane Club hangar donated by the oilfield companies was being erected. Eugene de La Rosa of the Works Department began laying the foundation for two auxilliary runways crossing the main strip, to form a triangle. These additional runways although short, allowed for changes in wind direction as well as provided emergency landing areas, if the main runway was blocked. When the plans for development of the airport were finalised, Sir Hubert Young cabled the British Government in London informing them of the

layout of the airport and offering whatever assistance Trinidad could give in the war effort. By this time World War II was well underway. The Trinidad oil industry became very important to the Allies' war effort and soon the colony became the British Empire's most important source of this precious commodity.

The two Tiger Moths for the LAC were in Trinidad and on January 3rd, Mr. R.M. Brown arrived to assemble them. He had previously worked as an engineer with the de Havilland aircraft company. In February, while Brown was assembling the two LAC aircraft, now registered VP-TAC and VP-TAD, as Trinidad's third and fourth aeroplanes, a 18.29 metres (sixty foot) wide paved ramp was being laid in front of the club's hangar. The Club's first flying instructor, Mr. J.F. Carroll arrived in Trinidad on February 28th, having previously been with the Leicester Flying Club. He was an experienced pilot, having accumulated more than two thousand, five hundred flying hours, most of which was as an instructor. By this stage, the Light Aeroplane Club had acquired two apprentice mechanics, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Sharma, the former to be replaced by Mr. Frank Fuller who was to spend many years with the LAC.

Carroll wasted no time and shortly after his arrival, the two Tiger Moths were test flown and licensed. At that time, the Commissioner of Police, Colonel Muller, was the Director of Civil Aviation and he was besieged by applications from enthusiastic young men who had passed the medical examinations and wanted to learn to fly. The first of these prospective pilots took off from Piarco on his first instructional

flight on 11th March 1940. Five days later the indefatigable Lady Young, who by this stage had been appointed Vice President, went up for her first flight in a Club aircraft. Shortly afterwards she left on another trip to the United Kingdom carrying the blueprints of the new Piarco airport. Up to this stage, the Club had not been formally opened, but this event was planned for Saturday 30th March. At five o'clock on the appointed afternoon, the members and guests met at Piarco and Mr. Ruthven Murray who had been involved with the idea of the LAC from its inception in 1934, gave the welcoming address. The reply was given by Governor Sir Hubert Young, following which Mrs. Huggins, wife of the Colonial Secretary, christened the Club's aircraft "Ajax and "Exeter". The names were chosen to commemorate the gallant fight by the Royal Navy cruisers against the German battleship Graf Spee.

Following the speeches, Carroll took off in VP-TAC and put on an aerobatic display, while Mr. A. Stone DFC carried on a commentary. Piarco had not seen such a flying display since the days of the great "Erl" Lickfold in 1932. The ceremony that afternoon marked the official opening of what was to become Piarco's oldest institution the Light Aeroplane Club of Trinidad and Tobago.

During these early months of World War Two, Trinidad and Tobago fliers were again in the forefront of military aviation. Eric Hobson had died on duty in the Middle East during 1939 and was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Order and a Mention in Despatches. He was the first of the aviators from our islands to receive this distinction. Horace Bowen was still in the Air Force and had

achieved the rank of Group Captain, in charge of No. 50 Training Group. In 1936 Claude Vincent had been decorated with the Air Force Cross in recognition of his outstanding work as a Test Pilot. By mid-1940, he was a Wing Commander on active service in the Middle East, where he shot down the aircraft carrying the Italian commanding general of the Aden area, but the original pioneers had now been joined by an ever-increasing flow of aviators from the islands. Seven days after Mr. Stone officiated at the opening of the LAC, his son Herbert was killed while flying a Blenheim bomber near Lundy Island.

Two outstanding Trinidad and Tobago aviators joined the RAF at this early stage of the conflict. The first was Garth Lyder, who had been active in aviation for some time. Although a qualified aircraft engineer, Lyder elected to become a pilot and served on bombers until 1944, when his B25 Mitchell was shot down over France. The explosion of the anti-aircraft shell had blown a parachute out of the aircraft and Lyder decided to stay with the machine to save his wounded crewman. He survived the crash and in the face of fire, exploding bombs and threatening Germans, he managed to save his wounded crewman, earning for himself a Distinguished Flying Cross. The second and most decorated wartime Trinidadian was John Carrington. He completed three operational tours with coastal and bomber commands in the course of which he seriously damaged a German U-Boat, ending the war with a Distinguished Service Order and a DFC. These men were the forerunners of a host of Trinidad and Tobago aviators, who were to build on the reputation amassed in the First World War and go on to confirm that the men from the

Caribbean islands made superb pilots.

Other than the occasional flying boat, the island of Tobago had been largely neglected from an aviation point of view. All this was about to change. For a long time there had been a crying need for an air service to Tobago, but no landing field or airline. The far-sighted Governor Young was in the process of changing both aspects. Firstly, he arranged for the Legislative Council to vote money for a Tobago airport and then had a survey carried out. A site called Crown Point located on the south western tip of the island was chosen. While the modernisation of Piarco was in progress, the Department of Works moved in and created a 670.7 metres (2,200 foot) flying field on the point. The first strip was constructed in a similar fashion to the original Piarco airfield, with a foundation of rocks and gravel overlaid by a bed of turf, planted with grass. When it was finished, there was as yet no airline, but the LAC had twenty pilots under instruction and Crown Point became their destination on cross country flights. The visits of the Tiger Moths gave Tobago a measure of air communication with Trinidad, but Governor Young also had an airline service under consideration.

The first people to attempt linking the Caribbean with a landplane service had been the short-lived Compagnie Générale Aeropostale, then Lickfold and Cipriani had pioneered trans-Caribbean flying. The idea of a service linking the islands of the Caribbean had been much discussed and in the thirties there had been several questions tabled in the British Parliament about why the islands had not been linked by air. The start of the KLM service in 1938 had only served to intensify these questions, with the result

that when Sir Hubert Young had been appointed Governor, one of his briefs had been to get aviation going in the West Indies. What was required was a British service linking the British islands. In the interim, Jack St. Hilaire and Carl Agostini had got together on a plan to lease two aircraft from Canada and hire pilots to start a service. Sir Hubert however, mindful of what had happened to the French service, wanted someone with experience to open civil aviation in the area, in such a fashion that it would not fail. Once again Lady Young came to the rescue and suggested the forty-five year old New Zealander Lowell Yerex, the dynamic founder of Transportes Aereos Centro Americanos (TACA.) Yerex had grown up in the United States and had served as a pilot in the First World War, where he had been shot down on three occasions. After the war, he formed a small airline in the United States which had failed in 1925. Following this he had gone into Honduras in 1930, with a second-hand aircraft and twenty-five dollars in his pocket. Almost single handedly, he built TACA into an airline with forty aircraft, serving seven Central American countries, and by 1939 had established a reputation as a man who could overcome any difficulty. Sir Hubert invited Yerex to come to Trinidad and look into the possibility of setting up an airline.

In May 1939, the period known as the "phony war" ended and the German armies romped out of their homeland, over-running Holland, Belgium and France in a lightning campaign. The consequences for the Dutch airline KLM were catastrophic. The airline's fleet of aircraft was spread between the Far East, Europe and the Caribbean. The Far East links

continued until the Japanese put a stop to their operations, while many of their European-based machines were captured, disrupting their continental services. Those machines that did manage to escape to England were amalgamated with Imperial Airways into high priority wartime work, leaving the Caribbean to virtually fend for itself. Without any form of back-up, the Caribbean service could not continue and on June 6th, KLM announced that its services were suspended. These services started again later in the war, but initially the decision once again left the great urgency to the plans for the opening of a service by a British group.

Five days after the ending of the KLM service, Mr. A.N. Perreira became the first LAC pilot to fly solo from Piarco. On the following day, the Trinidad and Tobago fighter fund was inaugurated, to raise money to buy Spitfires for the Battle of Britain, which was just about to start. This culminated in No. 74 squadron being officially named the Trinidad Squadron, a name which this British unit still carries to this day. Less than a week later, the second LAC pilot Mr. E.R. Carrington went solo at Piarco. Both these two pilots were to travel to England and join the RAF. They were to fly bombers and Carrington, brother of John Carrington was to be shot down over Germany and spend a long time as a prisoner of war. In the meantime, the management of the LAC had offered the services of the Club in the defence of the island and training of Royal Air Force pilots. This offer was taken up and Carroll was given a commission in the rank of Flt Lt with the local forces, so that he could carry out twice weekly reconnaissance flights around the coasts of Trinidad and Tobago, in conjunction

with the patrol work being carried out by the newly established Trinidad Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (TRNVR). On 12th July 1939 work started on an extension to the LAC hangar to provide a lounge, dressing room, canteen and kitchen, to facilitate the forthcoming Air Training Scheme (ATS). At an extraordinary general meeting of the LAC on 22nd July, the members agreed to forego all normal flying privileges, while the Club's aircraft and facilities were being used to further the war effort.

By this stage, the Trinidad Air Training Scheme had taken shape. Flt Lt Carroll was the commanding officer and chief instructor and he had been joined by Lt R.G. Williams as assistant instructor. Professor C.Y. Sheppard of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture was appointed Director of Ground Training and he was ably assisted by Dr. Jolly and the engineer Mr. Brown. Sir Hubert Young and Major Alan Storey DFC were the responsible Administrators and they began their recruiting drive on 12th August. The first class of eight students was selected from a very large number of applicants and began their training almost immediately. The prospective pilots reported to Piarco in uniform each morning for flight training and lectures, while in the evenings Professor Sheppard would conduct lectures in the classroom. The Club's facilities, including the canteen supplying hot meals, was part of the project, and the local branch of the Red Cross kept two nurses and an ambulance on standby at Piarco, whenever flying was in progress. This first group of students completed their training "A" Licence standard and put on a flying display on Friday 25th October 1939. While they were being trained, the Battle of Britain was

being fought and they went straight off to the RAF for advanced training and then to take their place in the front line. Their experiences were wide-ranging and varied and generally were typical of the Trinidad and Tobago fliers of World War Two.

The first group were L.G. Peyton, who achieved a DSO and a DFC for flying fighters, C.V. Perreira, who won a DFC and a Bar while flying Mosquito bombers as a pathfinder; L.G. Smith DFC who flew Typhoons and Tempests, his elder brother C.D.A. Smith DFC ended up on Mustangs after many daring wartime adventures, A.S. Kelshall who flew coastal command Beaufighters on anti-shipping strikes until shot down to become a prisoner of war. J.J. Pitts was following his brother Edward's footsteps, but Edward was killed on operations on 7th November before he could get to England. Edward was the second Trinidad airman to be killed in the war when his Blenheim bomber was shot down in the desert. J.J. Pitts also flew bombers and was lucky to survive after a disastrous crash with a Boston aircraft in Italy. D.G. Rochford survived the European war, only to die in May 1945 while flying a Mosquito in Australia. The senior student of the class, H.G. Venables, had quickly achieved the rank of Squadron Leader, but lost his life in April 1943 when his Havoc Night Intruder collided with a German night fighter over a German base in France. The experience of members of this class was fairly typical of the more than two hundred Trinidad and Tobago men who participated in the air war. Just over a quarter of them never came home.

While the Air Training Scheme was beginning, the first Pan American landplane arrived at Piarco. The thirty-two passenger, pressurised, four-engined Strato

Clipper touched down on August 2nd 1940. Pan Am had already announced that Piarco was to be one of the stops on their trans-Atlantic flights and the Clipper was the first of a long line of large modern aircraft that continues to operate at Piarco today. A few days later the Pan Am aircraft took Governor and Lady Young on a courtesy flight over Tobago and back. In the meantime, two major forces were preparing to transform Piarco - the Royal Navy and the Americans.

On 18th August 1940 during the Battle of Britain, several squadrons of Stuka dive bombers attacked Royal Naval Air Station (RNAS) Ford on England's south coast. Ford was the home of the Royal Navy's Observer training school and by the time the Germans were finished with it, most of the aircraft had been destroyed and a number of students killed. The Admiralty were forced to find a quiet area to re-establish the school and they began looking at possible overseas sites. Sir Hubert's description of Piarco and the plans that Lady Young had brought seemed to be ideal and they chose Trinidad as the new home for No. 1 Observer school, even before visiting the airfield. The Colonial Office cabled Sir Hubert on 9th September, advising him of the choice and the extensive construction and modernisation of Piarco that would be required.

They advised that Piarco would be required to house one hundred and forty aircraft and that a facility was needed for up to nine hundred men. Their advance party composed of Cmdr Prentice, S/Lt Head, Lt Cmdr Phillips and the dockyard superintendent Mr. Andrews was due in Trinidad at the end of September, but Sir Hubert was authorised

to go ahead with acquisition and construction as outlined in their telegram. Land in the Golden Grove area was acquired and work began on a large barrack and administrative centre which would house the naval personnel. The Department of Works was authorised to carry out all construction for the Royal Navy and they worked fast. By early November, the Golden Grove facility became operational and was christened HMS Goshawk.* On 6th November 1940 Royal Naval Air Station Piarco became a reality and on the eleventh, two of the squadrons from Ford recommissioned at Piarco. By 18th November No. 793 squadron commissioned, joining No. 750 and No. 752 as RNAS Piarco's initial inhabitants. The navy wanted all of the northern side of the airport and some areas on the south side. At this stage, the area to the west of the LAC hangar (part of the Bel Air Hotel) where today the Coast Guard Hangar stands, was allocated to the RAF, but this option was never taken up. The naval aircraft began arriving in Port of Spain in crates, from where they were transported to Piarco for assembly. At first it was only a trickle, but in time this built up into a flood that would transform Piarco for good.

The economy of the colony was booming, although this was shortlived. As in the First World War the economy had been stimulated by the war causing a rise in the price of agricultural produce and stimulating the oil industry even more. The Americans injected further capital into the local economy, and a whole new service industry was set up in order to cater for the American soldiers based

**The same facility was converted into the Golden Grove Prison in 1946.*

in Trinidad.

While the giant that would be RNAS Piarco was being formed and beginning to grow, Lowell Yerex had made three short visits to Trinidad in connection with the starting of an air service. To him the new idea was a challenge, particularly as he was getting little or no financial support for the venture. He purchased a second-hand Lockheed Lodestar and brought the aircraft in from San José, Costa Rica, in early November 1940. He decided to name the airline British West Indian Airways, (B.W.I.A.) reflecting both his British citizenship and the fact that it was intended to serve the British Caribbean. The aircraft was registered VP-TAE, to become Trinidad and Tobago's fifth aeroplane and both the registration and name were proudly painted on. On 23rd November he took off on a proving flight to Tobago with the British Minister of Guatemala Mr. J. Leche and his wife aboard, along with Flt Lt Carroll and Captain Mayow Short, ADC to the Governor. This was the first recorded landing of an airliner in Tobago. The flight was a success proving that the Lockheed Lodestar with its two engines could safely operate into Crown Point. On Monday 25th, Yerex's senior pilot, the twenty-seven year old "Snark" Wilson took off for Barbados on a proving flight. On board the aircraft were Governor and Lady Young, Mr. and Mrs. Leche, Mayow Short and Yerex. In Barbados, they landed at Seawell airport which had first been opened up by KLM. The party held discussions with the Governor of Barbados about the proposed service. They were back in Piarco at 5.05 p.m. that day, having successfully obtained the necessary permission and established the nucleus of a handling organisation in the

island. BWIA, Piarco's second oldest institution, was about to begin operations.

The year ended with Crown Point being declared a Customs aerodrome with the same status as Piarco and Cocorite. This aerodrome was to be the colony's secondary customs airport. It was managed by the Assistant Superintendent of Police in Tobago, who performed the duties of aerodrome superintendent. He carried out the day to day operations of the airport with a staff of one grade II airport attendant, and four daily paid workers. Customs and Immigration services were also now available on request.

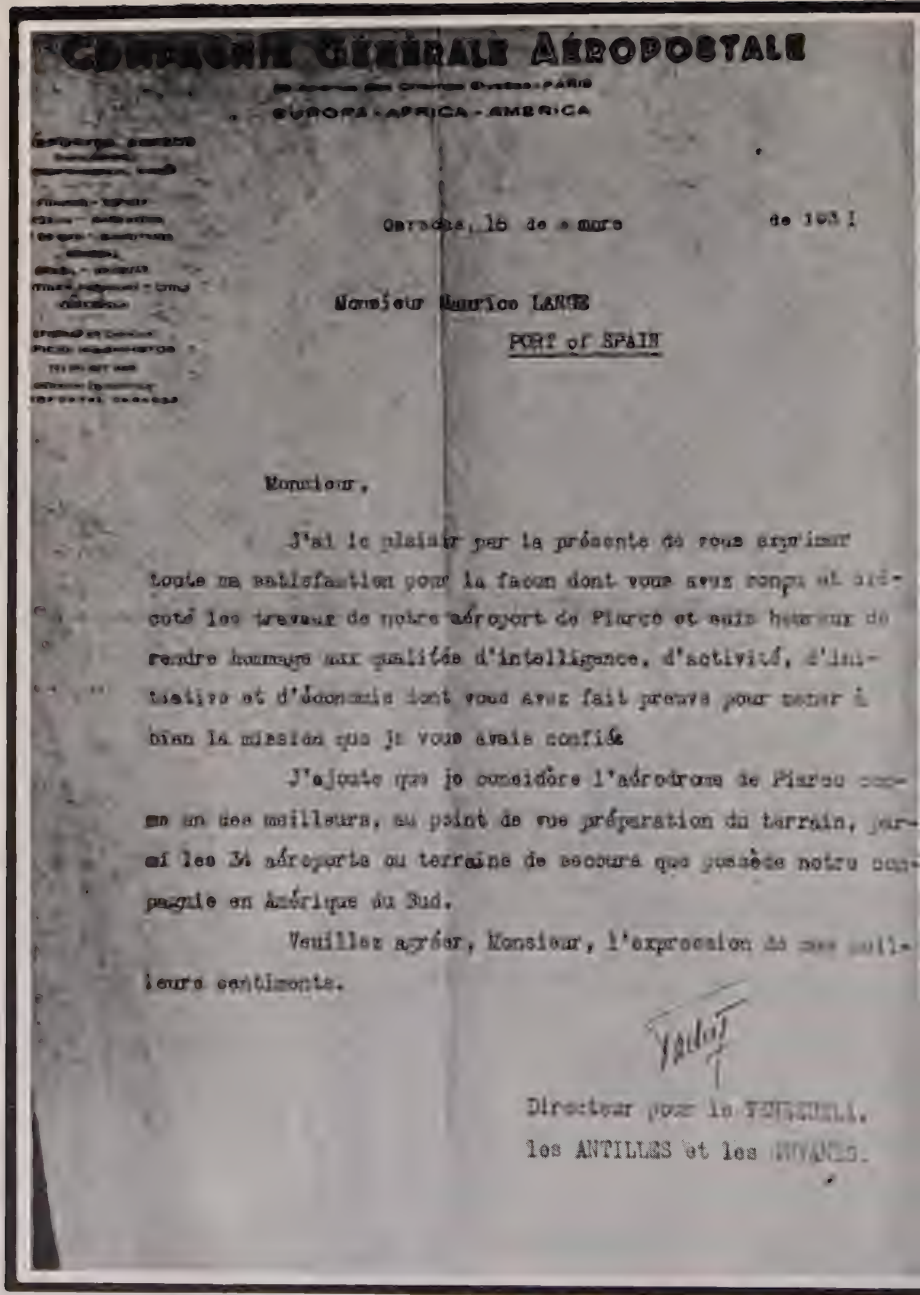
World War Two had not yet come to Trinidad, only its side effects. However, 1941 was to see the Fleet Air Arm and the Americans change not only Piarco, but all of Trinidad and Tobago.

On Wednesday 27th November, VP-TAE left Piarco at 7.00 a.m. for Tobago to inaugurate the Crown Point service. After a quick turnaround the aircraft was back in Piarco being prepared for the next service. At nine o' clock that morning it took off for Barbados on its first scheduled service to the island. The schedule called for a daily run to Barbados and ten flights weekly to Crown Point. Approval was by no means automatic and BWIA was on one month's probation, after which the Governor would decide if Yerex could continue. As fate would have it, during that month, the Governor found himself in Washington fighting for something much more important that was to shape the destiny of Trinidad. He was not on hand to decide on the probation period and Yerex just continued the service and slowly established his airline.

Plates

1931 – 1939

Terminal Building of Compagnie Générale Aeropostale, at Piarco in 1931.
Courtesy Emmanuel "Noche" Lange.



COMPAGNIE GÉNÉRALE AÉROPOSTALE

EUROPA - AFRICA - AMERICA

Carcès, le 16 de a mars de 193 1

Monsieur Maurice LANGE

PORT of SPAIN

Monsieur,

J'ai le plaisir par la présente de vous exprimer toute ma satisfaction pour la façon dont vous avez conçu et réalisé les travaux de notre aéroport de Piarco et suis heureux de rendre hommage aux qualités d'intelligence, d'activité, d'initiative et d'économie dont vous avez fait preuve pour mener à bien la mission que je vous avais confiée.

J'ajoute que je considère l'aérodrome de Piarco comme un des meilleurs, au point de vue préparation du terrain, parmi les 34 aéroports ou terrains de secours que possède notre compagnie en Amérique du Sud.

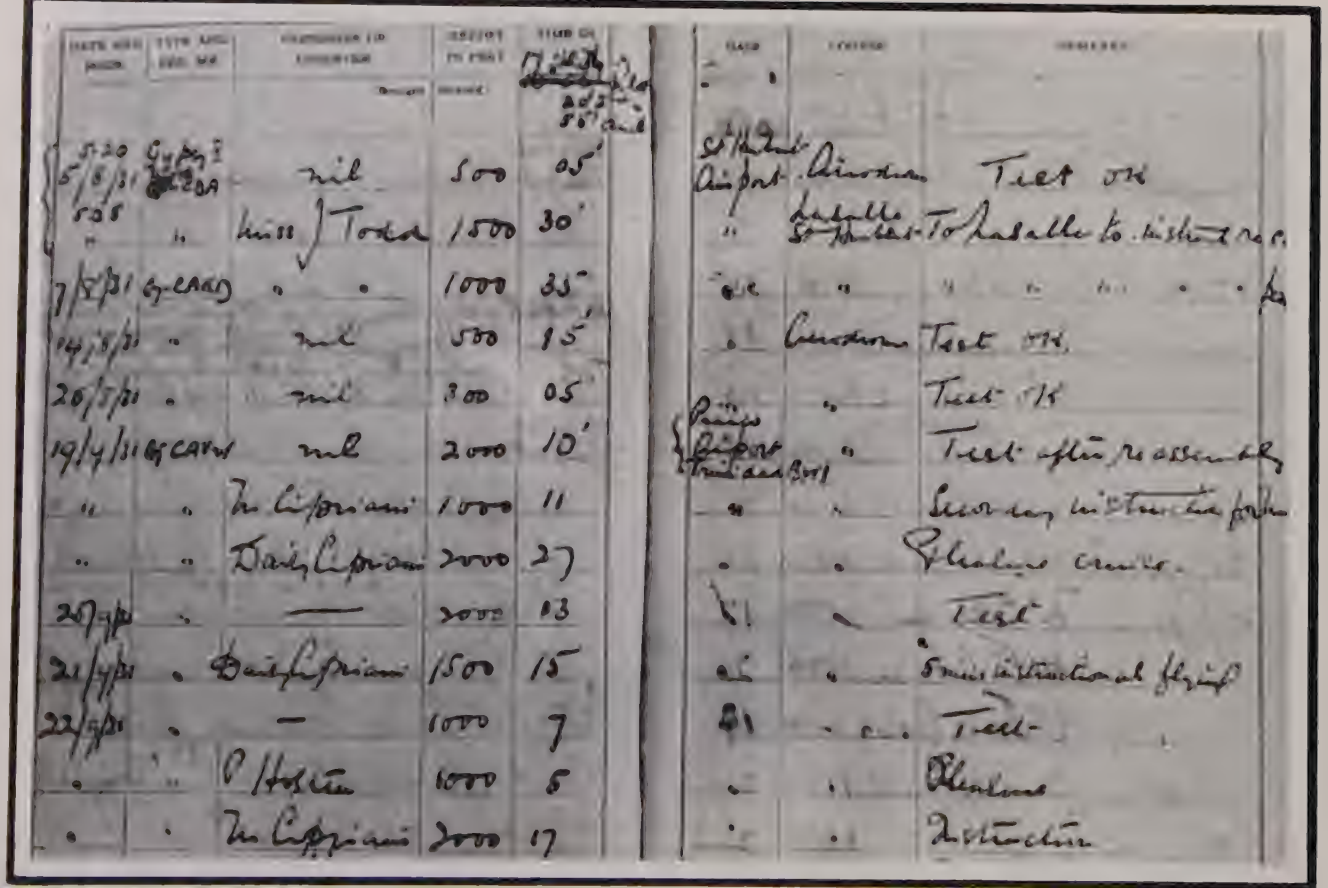
Veuillez agréer, Monsieur, l'expression de mes meilleurs sentiments.

Vachet

Directeur pour le VENEZUELA, les ANTILLES et les GUYANES.

Letter written by Paul Vachet to commend the building of Piarco Aerodromē by Maurice Lange in 1931.
Courtesy Emmanuel "Noche" Lange.

Maurice Lange. Courtesy Emmanuel "Noche" Lange.



courtesy Hilary Correia nee Lickfold

5/8/31	G-EBAA	nil	500	05
5/8/31	"	Miss Todd	1500	30
7/8/31	G-EBAA	" "	1000	35
14/8/31	"	nil	500	15
20/8/31	"	nil	300	05
19/4/31	G-EBAA	nil	2000	10
"	"	The Cisparian	1000	11
"	"	Daily Cisparian	2000	27
20/4/31	"	—	2000	13
21/4/31	"	Daily Cisparian	1500	15
22/4/31	"	—	1000	7
"	"	P Holden	1000	6
"	"	The Cisparian	2000	17

St Inglevert	Aindrom	Test OK
"	Isabelle to St Inglevert	To Isabelle to Instruct
"	"	" " " "
"	Aindrom	Test OK
"	"	Test OK
Paris Le Bourget	"	Test after reassembly
"	"	Several days instruction
"	"	Flying
"	"	Test
"	"	Solo instructional flight
"	"	Test
"	"	Flying
"	"	Instruction

Edmund "Erl" Lickfold in 1932.
Courtesy Hilary Correia nee Lickfold.

Trinidad's first Ground Engineer's Licences issued to Edmund Lickfold in 1932 Courtesy Hilary Correia nee Lickfold

No. of Licence 1.

Date of Issue 1st July 1932

Mr. Name Edmund A. Lickfold.

Address San Juan Road.

Tunapuna B.W.I.

Nationality British.

is hereby licensed as a Ground Engineer ("competent person" under Schedule II of the Air Navigation (Consolidation) Order, 1923) for those purposes [illegible] which are specified on [illegible] of this Licence.

This Licence is valid for a period of Twelve months from the 1st day of July 1932 to the 30th day of June 1933 inclusive, subject to Orders in Council made under the Air Navigation Act, 1920, and to directions issued by the Secretary of State thereunder.

[illegible]

[illegible] 1932

The Graffzeplin on the 13th October 1933
flying over Woodbrook Port of Spain. Courtesy Bernardo Bermudez.

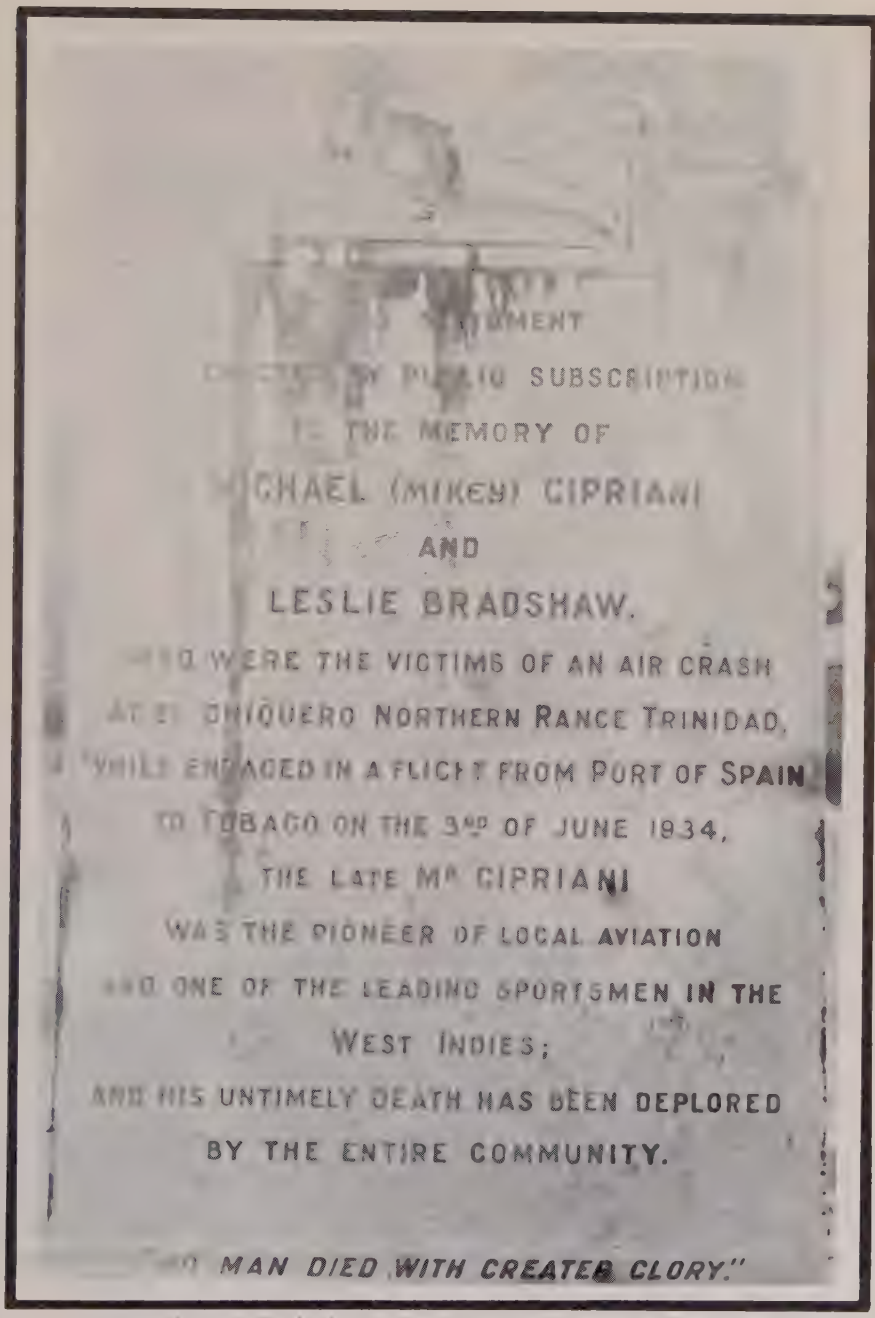
Michael "Mikey" Cipriani. Courtesy Trinidad Guardian.

Daisy and Mikey Cipriani. Courtesy Trinidad Guardian.

Cipriani's "Humming Bird" at Arima. Courtesy Hilary Correia.

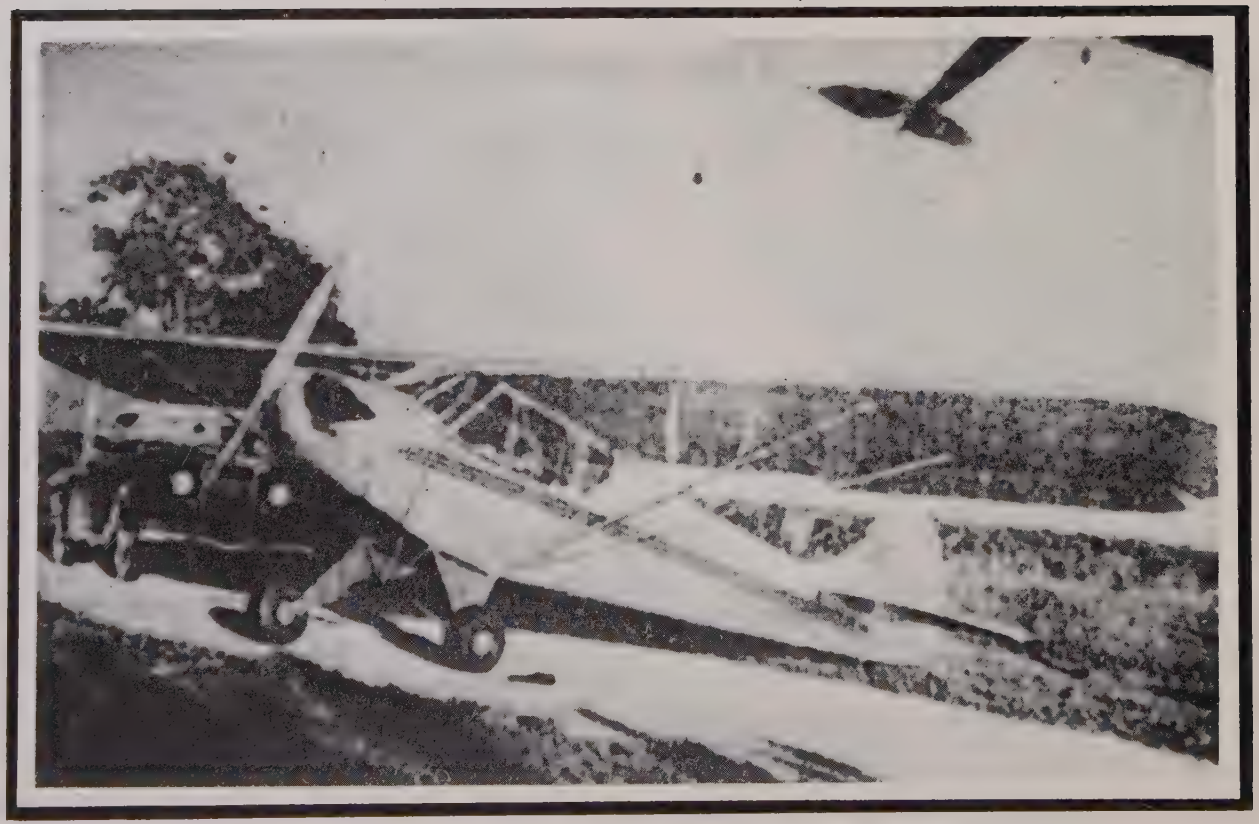
Wreckage of "Humming Bird II", in El Chiquero forest, 1934Courtesy Trinidad Guardian.

Funeral Procession of Cipriani and Bradshaw in 1937. Courtesy Trinidad Guardian.


MENT
PUBLIC SUBSCRIPTION
THE MEMORY OF
CHAEL (MIKEY) CIPRIANI
AND
LESLIE BRADSHAW.
WERE THE VICTIMS OF AN AIR CRASH
AT EL CHIQUERO NORTHERN RANCE TRINIDAD,
WHILE ENGAGED IN A FLIGHT FROM PORT OF SPAIN
TO TOBAGO ON THE 3RD OF JUNE 1934,
THE LATE MR CIPRIANI
WAS THE PIONEER OF LOCAL AVIATION
AND ONE OF THE LEADING SPORTSMEN IN THE
WEST INDIES;
AND HIS UNTIMELY DEATH HAS BEEN DEPLORED
BY THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY.
MAN DIED WITH GREATER GLORY."

Memorial of Cipriani and Bradshaw at Mucurapo Cemetery, Port of Spain. Photo by Lloyd Pierre Jr.

Frank "Jack" Hilaire's aircraft in 1937. Courtesy Trinidad Guardian.



Frank "Jack" St. Hilaire in 1986. Photo by Lloyd Pierre Jr.

K.L.M. Fokker FXII Super Tri Motor, at Piarco Courtesy West Indian Committee Circular.

K.L.M. at Piarco in October 1938. Courtesy Trinidad Guardian.

K.L.M. Terminal Building at Piarco in 1938. Courtesy Trinidad Guardian.

The Piarco Savannah, 1939. Courtesy West Indian Committee Circular.

Pan American's flying boat, January 1939, Golden Grove lagoon Tobago. Courtesy Mrs. R. Johnson.

CHAPTER 6

THE WORLD WAR TWO AIRBASES

As had happened during the First World War all social and political agitation within the colony was discouraged. The main social agitator Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler, who had emerged as a leader during the disturbances in the 1930's, was interned for the duration of the war. Earlier in 1937 the Forster Commission had been appointed to report specifically on Trinidad and Tobago and in 1939 the Moyne Commission was appointed to report on the disturbances in the British West Indies. The Moyne Commission recommended a gradual process towards universal adult suffrage. The matter of whom to give the vote rested in the hands of a local Franchise Committee which took a very long time to report. It was not until 1946 that the Committee recommended that adults over twenty one years of age should be given the vote.

In December 1940, Sir Hubert Young had gone off

to Washington to meet with Cordell Hull, the US Secretary of State and Lord Lothian, the British Ambassador to the United States. His mission was basically to oppose the setting up of American bases in Trinidad. Sir Hubert felt that the bases should not be allowed in Trinidad at all, but if it was necessary, then they should not be located in what he considered to be the best parts of the island. The Americans wanted the Caribbean bases to form what they termed, a steel ring of defences protecting the United States. Britain on the other hand, found her hands virtually tied by the desperate need for convoy escorts to combat the North Atlantic wolf packs.* Unfortunately, although Sir Hubert was arguing for the good of Trinidad and Tobago, neither the Colonial Government nor the Americans could predict the future. None of the parties concerned was aware that the Germans intended to turn the Caribbean into a major war theatre and in fact the decision did not really rest with these two parties. If the bases agreement had not been finalised in 1941, the events of 1942 would have forced their construction, if only to ensure the survival of the Allies.

Strategically, the islands of Trinidad and Tobago sit astride the shipping routes from South to North America and lie within striking distance of the route from the Cape of Good Hope to the United States. Once the German U-Boats got their teeth into this vital shipping, it became a matter of critical importance to put a stop to their activities. The convoying of merchant ships was the only answer and the Gulf of Paria was the finest natural harbour in the Western hemisphere. It evolved into the ideal and indeed, the

**wolf packs - group of U-Boats with a specific target.*

only protected convoy center in this part of the world. Airpower was the key to the protection of the convoys and Trinidad's position dictated that it be turned into a giant aircraft carrier. The Germans were able to achieve outstanding initial successes in the Caribbean U-Boat campaign and were only checked by airpower, mainly operating from Trinidad. In fact, Trinidad became the pivot of the Caribbean war. Initially, the argument about bases revolved around Chaguaramas and Fort Read, but in time it became necessary to staff two hundred and twenty-one locations in Trinidad and Tobago with American troops. At the centre of this spider's web of military installations sat Piarco airfield.

In January 1941, Captain R.H. Burton RNR(A) assumed command of what was now Piarco Naval Air Station. The airfield's expansion plan was now in full swing. Under the direction of Cmdr Prentice, the Department of Works commenced the lengthening of the main east-west runway to 1524.3 metres (five thousand feet.) This meant that the eastern end of the runway was well beyond the point where the Golden Grove Road crossed. This was followed by the paving of the north-easterly crossing runway 04/22 and this strip was also lengthened so that it crossed the road. It was at this stage that the south-east runway 13 was also paved. This strip extended from a point east of the road, running almost parallel to the road, ending with the threshold of its reciprocal runway 31, well east of the Piarco Terminal building, on the south side of the main runway. The airfield now had three fully paved runways, giving six different landing directions, to cater for the projected vast increase in air traffic. The main runway

was 45.7 metres (one hundred and fifty feet) wide, while the two auxilliary runways were each 30.4 metres (one hundred feet wide,) all the runways were laid on a foundation of rocks and gravel, with a bed of turf overlaid by a bitumen paving. Extensive drainage works were undertaken to ensure that although areas around the airport might flood, the runways would always be clear of water.

The runway improvements took up most of 1941 and during this time Piarco's aircraft compliment increased dramatically. No. 750 Squadron started 1941 with Blackburn Shark torpedo bombers being used in the reconaissance role, switching in 1942 to Fairey Albacore's and eventually ending up with the astonishing establishment of seventy of these aircraft on strength. One trainee of this squadron was twenty-one year old Allan Davis who later became the Lord Mayor of London and revisited Piarco in August 1986. No. 752 Squadron used Proctors and Stilman Reliants, with a few Tiger Moths. This squadron also grew to be an ultra-large unit with at least fifty aircraft in use. No. 793 Target towing squadron started the year with its Blackburn Roc fighters being used as target tugs. By 1943 this squadron was using a mix of Martinets and Albacores for its towing and air-firing duties. These three squadrons were joined by the newly formed No. 749 squadron on 1st January, 1941. This unit was responsible for twin engined aircraft and when formed they boasted four Walrus amphibians, but by 1942 they were using the Grumman Goose, the Anson and some OS2N Kingfishers borrowed from No. 703 Squadron at Palisadoes, Jamaica, as well as their Walruses. This was another unusual unit that dwarfed conventional squadron

organisations.

At its peak, RNAS Piarco operated well over two hundred aircraft, making it an extremely busy airbase and to support this number of aircraft the navy had to lay down considerable infrastructure.

A network of paved taxiways was laid down so that each runway threshold was served by its own, while the crossing points for the auxilliary landing strips provided high speed turnoffs from the main runway. The major part of the Naval Base occupied the northern side of the field and eleven large Bellman-type hangars were erected on concrete bases, alongside an extensive paved ramp on the north side of the main runway. What is today the main entrance road to Piarco airport branched off to the right and ran westwards to a dead end inside the naval maintenance base. A control gate was located just to the south of what is today called Oropune village, thus cutting off the northern side of the airport to all but military traffic. The hangars were situated in pairs, with the eleventh on its own on the north side of the entrance road, in the area presently occupied by the BWIA car park. Today, five of these large World War II hangars are still in use.

Initially, the old Golden Grove Road was retained, although it crossed the middle of the airfield. A barrier was placed across the road on the north side, so that vehicular traffic could be controlled, but as the volume of air traffic increased, this arrangement proved unworkable. A new project had to be undertaken to divert the Golden Grove Road. This new road branched off to the left just before the present telephone exchange in Oropune village, and ran south-eastwards circling the eastern end of the run-

way, where it swung westwards to link up with the original road on the south side of the airport.

The navy had bought the old Port of Spain trolley bus garage and this structure was erected to the east of the hangars where it was used for aircraft maintenance, while the big hangars were being erected. Between the trolley bus garage and the easternmost hangars, a complex of workshops, offices and barracks sprung up, spilling over on to the north side of the road. In this area, the airfield's fire station, radio station and temporary control tower were located, near the present fire station. Well to the east of the intersection of the two auxilliary runways, the navy positioned their extensive fuel and bomb dumps. Also in this area, alongside the new Golden Grove Road, they established a pistol range that still stands. In fact traces of most of these old roads and facilities still exist.

Certain areas of the south side of the airport were the only zones accessible to civilians. The southern taxiway from the main runway ran westwards, crossing the threshold of runway 31 from where it became an extensive joint military civil aircraft parking area. The installations on the south side of the field began in the west with the Light Aeroplane Club hangar and facilities, now exclusively dedicated to the Air Training Scheme. To the east was the new terminal building. The original temporary structure erected in 1940 was destroyed by fire on 7th April 1942 and the replacement building with its control tower on top remained the main Piarco Terminal until 1960 when the present structure was built. Alongside the Terminal was the BWIA compound containing workshops and a nose hangar. The Pan

Am nose hangar stood alongside the BWIA area and further to the east stood the nose hangar used by the American Air Transport Command.

When Piarco became a Naval Air Station in 1940, an independent company of the Trinidad Volunteers was stationed at the field and charged with the security of the airbase.

When the American 99th anti-aircraft regiment arrived in Trinidad during May 1942, Battery G with six 90mm guns were based at Piarco. These troops went into barracks in the area where Piarco's present Terminal building stands. Directly to the east of the American barracks, where the present Airports Authority Administration Centre now stands, the Fleet Air Arm erected a pavilion for the entertainment of the base personnel. In time this facility was enlarged and converted into a flight crew overnight centre and administration block, for the world girdling giant that became the American Air Transport Command. At the end of the war, the building passed to Pan Am who ran it as a guest house until it was purchased by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in 1980.

During 1941, while Piarco developed, the Americans arrived in Trinidad and began constructing their two main bases at Chaguaramas and Cumuto. The first priority was the construction of an airfield at Fort Read (Cumuto) and work began on the facility that was to become Waller Field. The inital plan called for the construction of five runways and one hundred and three revetments, but work was always behind schedule so that when their 1st Bombardment squadron (Bomron) with six B18 bombers arrived in Trinidad on 1st April 1941, they were forced to

establish a temporary base at Piarco. The building of the Waller Field base involved the clearing of a large section of the El Mamo forest and the diverting of the Aripo river eastwards, to make room for the runways. Eventually on 28th October 1941, Waller Field was commissioned, and the 1st Bomron reluctantly moved from Piarco to the new base. Waller Field had been named after Major Alfred J. Waller, an American Air Corps pilot who had been killed in an aircraft crash on 11th September 1937, at Langley Field, Virginia. The runway plan at Waller Field was by no means complete and in fact only two of the projected five runways were ever completed. Both these strips were paved with concrete, one being 1524.3 metres (five thousand feet), while the other was 1097.5 metres (three thousand six hundred feet) long. By the end of the war, these runways had been increased to 2134.1 metres (seven thousand feet) and 1524.3 metres (five thousand feet) respectively, making the northern runway longer than Piarco's main runway. Also included in the construction was a 0.8 kilometres (half mile) long maintenance ramp, situated immediately south of the shorter runway. Waller Field, although it was to be host to one of the largest aviation movements in history was never very popular and indirectly it reflected great credit on the site chosen for Piarco.

Although Waller Field was only 12.8 kilometers (eight miles) east of Piarco and 1.6 kilometres (one mile) closer to the hills, it experienced forty percent more rain than Piarco. Its weather was so poor that by late 1942, most of the combat aircraft were moved to Longdenville, where pilots would be sure of finding their airfield under all weather conditions.

Waller Field remained primarily a transport base, although a squadron of fighters was also stationed there.

Initially, the Americans planned four major air facilities. The first and most important had been Waller Field, while the second was the ATS airfield at Edinburgh, neat Longdenville. The third airbase was planned for the area 11.2 kilometres (seven miles) southeast of Princes Town and the last was to be located 1.6 kilometres (one mile) west of Pierreville in Mayaro. The third airfield near Princes Town never got beyond the planning stage, but the Mayaro Field was cut out of the jungle and used by light communications aircraft, supporting the infantry regiment based along the east coast. When the Fleet Air Arm aircraft began arriving at Piarco, the Government realised that as the navy air traffic built up, it would seriously hamper the basic flying training that the ATS pilots needed and they looked around for an alternative. At Edinburgh, they found the ideal location. Originally the open space near the village had been used as a race track for thoroughbred horses, but late in 1940 the demands of the war brought an end to these sporting activities. Edinburgh was levelled and by the end of the year, ATS aircraft were using it for training. Many of the ATS pilots used Edinburgh throughout 1941 and up to July 1942, but by this stage there was no room in Trinidad's crowded skies for basic flying training and the ATS ended.

The opening of the German U-Boat offensive in February 1942 meant an immediate expansion of the island's air facilities and the Americans began work at Edinburgh. They lengthened the original ATS strip to

1524.3 metres (five thousand feet) and paved it. On 20th October 1942, the first phase was ready and both the US 1st Bomron and the RAF 53rd anti-submarine squadron took up residence. Further development continued and Edinburgh Field became the northern runway of a two-runway complex, that eventually grew to be bigger than its parent Waller Field. The second 1524.3 metres (five thousand foot) runway called Xeres was connected to Edinburgh by 2.4 kilometres (a mile and a half) of taxiways and camouflaged dispersed parking bays. This base became progressively more important until by December of that year, it was operating four squadrons of anti-submarine bombers and like Piarco and Waller Field, had its own infantry and anti-aircraft units.

By this stage, Edinburgh Field was the most important anti-submarine base and becoming a little crowded. To ease the congestion and provide a dispersed site, the Americans began to develop an area near Exchange that they eventually called Camden Field. This satellite of Edinburgh was paved to 1067 metres (three thousand five hundred feet) and handled the spill over from its parent field. As the fight against the U-Boats escalated, the US Navy decided to base Airship squadron ZP51 in Trinidad to assist with patrolling and anti-submarine operations. This necessitated a further expansion of the Edinburgh airbase. A Blimp matt, mooring masts and an enormous hangar were constructed 1.6 kilometres (one mile) south of the Xeres runway and connected to the main part of the base by roads. The first blimp arrived long before the facilities were ready and by March 1943, the US Navy K-Type airship became a

familiar sight in the skies over Trinidad.

As the US Navy expanded, they began to take over the brunt of the anti-submarine effort and in June 1943, the Edinburgh base passed to Navy control. The US Army Air Corps aircraft and personnel returned to Waller Field and began leaving the Caribbean theatre. Then on 11th November 1943, Edinburgh was renamed Carlsen Field, in honour of Captain Kenneth V. Carlsen of the 35th bombardment squadron. Captain Carlsen was operating out of Zandery in Dutch Guiana when he was killed on the night of 14th December 1942. His B18 bomber suffered a double engine failure and he held the aircraft level long enough for his crew to bail out. In time, the entire airbase and the surrounding area became known as Carlsen Field.

While the US Army Air Corps built its bases throughout Trinidad, the US Navy concentrated on Chaguaramas. The seaplane base was ready to accept aircraft in May 1942, but the German submarine offensive in the Caribbean had caught the US Navy by surprise and it was not until September 1942 that the first patrol squadrons were ready. The white camouflaged Catalinas of VP-53 and the sea gray Martin Mariners of VP-74, were the first two patrol squadrons to arrive in Chaguaramas. Despite the late arrival of the aircraft, Chaguarams was to play a decisive role in the war at sea and at the peak of activity five squadrons were based there. The base remained with only one large flying boat hangar throughout the war, because the others were lost when the ship carrying them was sunk by a U-Boat. The Chaguaramas area was a superb flying boat operating area, just as Major Pat Cochran had pre-

dicted back in 1921.

In May 1942 when the American combat troops of the 11th Infantry arrived, they were initially housed in a tent city on what was called Docksite. Immediately to the west of this area lay the old Mucurapo Flying Field and although it was only a 548.7 metres (eighteen hundred foot) grass strip, it was available. It was not long before the Americans began operating their light communications aircraft from the field and shortly thereafter the site began to be developed. Along the north side of the strip bordering the Mucurapo Road, six large warehouses and other barrack buildings were erected, while on the south side another four warehouses and a tented survivor camp came into being. Mucurapo Field even ended up with anti-aircraft protection, because of its proximity to the battery on Mucurapo Point, but this was the swan song of the flying field because it did not survive the war. The runway stood only 274.3 metres (three hundred yards) from the houses in Belle Smythe Street and the climbout path lay directly over Woodbrook. The field was not popular with the residents of the area.

The Royal Navy regularly flew single engine aircraft to and from Tobago and there was always concern about the fact that there was no suitable landing field along the route. In 1941 they decided to remedy this situation by laying down an emergency strip at Galera Point in Toco. By grading the top of the ridge they were able to lay down a paved 457.3 metres (fifteen hundred foot) landing field, that not only served as an emergency field, but also as an excellent short field training runway. Toco Field however, was unique in the world of aviation.

Fortunately, the geography of the Point allowed the runway to point directly into the wind, but this meant that 60.9 metres (two hundred feet) from the end of the strip stood the massive Toco lighthouse. To avoid this immovable obstruction, it was necessary to put a corner in the runway. Toco thus became one of the few flying fields that described a curve. The solution worked, because on take off all a pilot had to do was keep his machine in the centre of the paved strip and he would pass just to the south of the lighthouse. This unique and charming flying field continued in use right up to the seventies, but sadly, by the decade of the eighties it had virtually been destroyed by neglect and a host of holiday makers camping on it.

Crown Point airfield received little attention during the early years of the war. BWIA operated into this 670.7 metres (two thousand two hundred foot) strip without too much complaint and the Royal Navy found it adequate for their single-engined aircraft. However, in late October 1942, an audacious U-Boat commander destroyed a merchant ship in broad daylight, less than 8 kilometres (five miles) from the field and this highlighted how vulnerable the area was. The U-Boats appeared to be turning the Galleon's Passage between Trinidad and Tobago into their private playground and the defenders were forced to take action. In December 1942 the Government acquired the land around the field and handed it over to the US Army engineers. They lengthened the strip to 1524.3 metres (five thousand feet) and built camouflaged parking bays for their anti-submarine bombers on the south side of the field. The usual bed of rock and turf was used, but the Ameri-

cans had also developed a technique of mixing crushed coral with the topsoil, that gave Crown Point a very durable surface. The field was now long enough to handle any of the World War Two aeroplanes.

By mid-1943, Trinidad and Tobago had reached its ultimate wartime aviation development. Twelve operational runways and a giant seaplane base were generating a considerable volume of air traffic, but other factors served to escalate the overcrowding still further. The Gulf of Paria had become an aircraft carrier shakedown area, particularly for the big Essex class fleet carriers who used the Gulf to train for the Pacific battles. Each of these carriers operated an air group of at least one hundred aircraft and there were occasions when there were up to three of them in the Gulf at the same time. It became necessary to move the navy anti-submarine bombers back to Waller Field and dedicate Carlsen Field to carrier landing practice. Scattered around the coasts of Trinidad were a host of bombing and gunnery ranges where the many combat pilots sharpened their skills. The entry of Brazil into the war in August of 1942, added another dimension. Waller Field and Piarco in particular became staging bases for the hundreds of aircraft going south. Some of these machines were destined for service in Brazil while many others were using Brazil as a jumping off point, to cross the South Atlantic for the African and European theatres. In 1940, the Royal Navy had chosen Piarco for their training school, because it was a quiet backwater. By 1943, they were not so sure.

CHAPTER 7

TO WIN A WAR

At eleven thirty on the night of 18th February 1942, both the freighter Mokihana and the tanker British Consul were ripped open by the blast of torpedoes, right inside the Port of Spain harbour. A daring commander named Albrecht Achilles, in the U161 had brought World War Two to Trinidad. The U-Boat had entered the Bocas and evading the patrols, had worked its way up into the harbour, but to make matters worse, he managed to get out of the Gulf after his attack. The attack caused absolute confusion in Trinidad. Although the island was literally crawling with military personnel, they had all grown bored with nothing happening and as a result, Trinidad had been universally considered a backwater of World War Two.

Two days prior to the attack in the harbour, three other U-Boats had carried out a similar operation around Curacao and Aruba, to open the German

Caribbean offensive. Two days after the Trinidad attack a fifth U-Boat, U-129 commanded by Nicholai Claussen started a spate of attacks on shipping between Galera Point and Georgetown thereby cutting off the vital bauxite route from British Guiana to Trinidad. The effect of these attacks was to virtually bring shipping in the area to a standstill. At Piarco all training had to stop and the instructor pilots of the four Fleet Air Arm squadrons had to join in the vast anti-submarine operation that commenced. The initial operations had little effect on the Germans, because neither the Fleet Air Arm nor the Americans were experienced enough or adequately armed to cope with the North Atlantic veterans who had ravaged their shipping. By the time the first five U-Boats had exhausted their torpedoes and were ready to head home, they had sunk forty-one ships and seriously damaged eleven others.

These initial attacks had nearly all taken place in what was known as the Trinidad Sector, which stretched from Aruba in the west to the Brazillian border in the east, bounded in the north by an east-west line that passed between St. Lucia and Martinique. All military activity within this sector was Trinidad's responsibility. The Caribbean Sea Frontier was divided into three sectors controlled by Trinidad, Puerto Rico and Panama and all three sectors saw extensive U-Boat activity, but because of Trinidad's strategic position, it was the focal point of the battle and the U-Boat commanders grew to know Trinidad very well.

Following a two-week lull in the second half of March, another wave of U-Boats hit the Caribbean with devastating force. Overnight, what had been a

quiet backwater of World War Two became a vital theatre of operations, as the Germans transferred their attention from the US east coast to the Caribbean. The U-Boats were after shipping wherever they could get it and it was immaterial whether a ship was sunk in the North Atlantic or the Caribbean, it was still a ship gone and the critical loss of a valuable cargo.

After the initial shock, the Americans and the British began a massive reinforcement of the Caribbean and in particular Trinidad. No. 749 squadron at Piarco remained on anti-submarine patrol with its Walrus and Goose amphibians, when the three other squadrons went back to training. As the number of lost ships grew, the US anti-submarine squadrons arrived, spreading out through the Trinidad sector. At first, only B18 bombers were available. The Caribbean was the home of this curious aircraft throughout World War Two. It was a mixture of the DC-2 wings and engine, matched to a deep bellied shark-mounted fuselage. The aeroplane was not ideal for anti-submarine work, but in 1942 it was all that was available and all the US Army bomber squadrons were equipped with that type of aircraft. Into Waller Field came P-39 Aircobra and P-40 Tomahawk fighters while No, 793 FAA squadron at Piarco received two seat Fairey Fulmer fighters. Chaguaramas received a squadron of OS2N single seat Kingfisher floatplanes, which like the fighters, were of limited anti-submarine value, but at least they could patrol and force U-Boats to submerge.

The German offensive in the Caribbean had been quite unexpected and the anti-submarine forces were unable to contain it, with the result that the U-Boats

operated with an extraordinary degree of freedom. By June 1942, there were twenty-six U-Boats in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, and they sank a total of eighty-one ships, creating a crisis situation. They all but brought the Caribbean to a standstill and the area off Trinidad's north coast became known as "Torpedo Junction". No inter-island shipping moved at all during the night and sometimes the thump of U-Boat diesels could be heard around the coasts of the islands. It reached the stage where in August 1942 the Royal Air Force had to transfer the experienced No. 53 Coastal Command squadron from England to Trinidad, to help the Americans cope with the scourge of the U-Boats.

The situation around Trinidad had reached the stage where everyone concerned was jumpy. Troops and aircraft were pouring in and armed camps were springing up all over the island, with the result that more and more airspace was being restricted. Inevitably, the soldiers became very trigger happy and there were numerous reports of aircraft coming under fire from the ground. Early in May 1942, Major G.R.G. Alston became the Administrator of the Air Training Scheme and he realised that there was now no room in Trinidad's increasingly crowded and sometimes hostile skies for basic flying training. Piarco was approaching its peak capacity and the American bombers were shortly to take over Edinburgh Field. Sadly, after completing the training of eight classes, the ATS had to close. In July, the last class of student pilots completed their flying training and left for the United Kingdom. The LAC hangar and aircraft were handed over to the navy for the duration of the war. Sir Hubert Young, the mentor of Trinidad and

Tobago aviation was not on hand for this sad occasion. He had been recalled early in 1942, partly because the Americans had found him to be a tough customer.

The pilots of the Air Training Scheme had all gone off to Peterborough airfield in England, where they received further training and were graded as either prospective bomber or fighter pilots. Those chosen for fighters usually attended flying schools in the United Kingdom, while the prospective bomber pilots went to Canada, or the Bahamas for their multi-engine training.

In July 1941, Trinidadian Kenneth Lindsay Grant had been killed when his Fulmer fighter was lost, operating from HMS Ark Royal which was escorting a convoy to Malta. Grant was the only casualty in 1941, but the following year two of our islanders were to lose their lives in the air. Alex Mc Donald became the second naval aviator to die when his aircraft crashed in Malta in February and Richard Bryden was killed when the engine of his Hurricane failed over Scotland in May. During 1942, the majority of the former ATS pilots from Piarco were in Training and they would not fly operationally before 1943, when many of them would give their lives in the air war. There were however, a large number of Trinidad and Tobago men flying operationally who had joined the Air Force on their own at the start of the conflict.

By the end of 1942, the Allies were beginning to exert a measure of control over the activities of the U-Boats in the Caribbean. This was due to a combination of technical anti-submarine advances, the convoying of merchant ships and the intervention of Adolf Hitler. In a reaction to the Allied invasion of

Algeria and Morocco, he ordered all U-Boats to the North West African coast, with the result that most of the boats en route to the Caribbean were diverted. It took considerable time to get the schedule back in order and this lull gave the Americans the break they needed. By the time the U-Boats were able to get back to the Caribbean in strength in 1943, the US Navy were at last ready to mount a serious challenge to them. In the meantime, all Piarco's squadrons had gone back to their training routine. No. 752 squadron with its single engine Proctors and Reliants carried out basic Observer and navigation training, while No. 749 with its Walrus, Goose and Anson aircraft handled the more advanced long range navigation and bombing exercises. No. 793 squadron used its Fulmers and Albacores to tow aerial targets for the gunners in No. 750 squadron Albacores to shoot at. The firing, bombing and torpedo-dropping ranges for the Fleet Air Arm aircraft were all in the Gulf of Paria, where TRNVR vessels handled range safety.

Through all this escalating aviation activity, BWIA continued operating and indeed the pressure of the U-Boats ensured that they were the only practical means of travel between the islands. There were considerable restrictions on where civil aircraft could fly and the BWIA machines had to be careful to stay within the approved entry corridors into and out of Trinidad. Therefore, for security reasons, as soon as a civil airliner crossed the Trinidad coast all passenger windows had to be curtained to ensure that passengers did not see the considerable military activity and the bases that dotted the island. Keeping BWIA going during the war, however, was an extremely difficult task. By 1943, the airline had acquired

a second Lodestar and a single Lockheed 12. However, in 1943 August, the Lodestar VP-TAH was destroyed when the aircraft caught fire during a refuelling operation at Piarco. At around the same time, the other Lodestar ran off the runway at Vigie in St. Lucia and seriously damaged a wing and the fuselage. To further compound the problem, the remaining Lockheed 12 needed an engine change leaving BWIA without any operable aircraft. During these war years, spare parts for civil aircraft were extremely difficult to obtain and any damage to an aircraft could take a considerable period of time to repair. Despite these difficulties, BWIA was carrying up to thirty five thousand passengers annually, as well as 20,454.5 kilograms (forty five thousand pounds) of mail and 68,181.8 kilograms (one hundred and fifty thousand pounds) of freight. They were serving Trinidad, Tobago, Grenada, St. Lucia, Barbados, St. Vincent, Antigua and St. Kitts.

By this stage, the airline was sixty percent owned by Yerex with the British Government and the public each holding twenty percent of the shares. Yerex was Managing Director, with Sir Lennox O'Reilly as Chairman of the Board. The other Board Members were the Honourable K. Murray who was also Operations Manager, the Honourable Gerald Wight, T. Geddes Grant with K.T. Crutch representing BOAC.*

George Wight was Company Secretary and Lawrence Yucette was the Accountant. John Rahr was the assistant Operations Manager and Alex Gordon was Traffic Manager, with many other Trinidadian employees, among whom were Lionel Paton, Emman-

**BOAC was given the right to appoint one director to BWIA's board on behalf of the British Government.*

uel "Noche" Lange, John Dobson, Eamon Luengo and Yolanda Franco. BWIA had four captains, two British, an American and an Australian. There were seven co-pilots, two of them English, two Canadians, one American, one from British Guiana and one from Argentina. Of these early pilots, the longest serving was Canadian Jerry Grogan who flew with BWIA up to the mid-sixties. BWIA's first air hostess was Trinidadian Sylvia Johnson and she was followed by Helen Scharf from St. Kitts, Margrete Bolton from Antigua and Dolores Gibb. In the meantime, Yerex's pioneering instinct had led him into taking a hand in the founding of Aerovias Brazil, but BWIA was becoming far too important to be owned by him and during one of his frequent absences, a boardroom coup took place. New shares were issued and the Government bought them up to take over the controlling interest in the airline. After this, Yerex's influence steadily declined in BWIA and after the war, this pioneer of Central American, Caribbean and South American aviation emigrated to Argentina, where he died from cancer in December 1968.

The year 1943 saw the Americans take the offensive against the U-Boats. During the course of the previous year, seven U-Boats had been sunk, two of them in the Trinidad Sector, although not by aircraft actually based in the island. However, many attacks had been made and literally dozens of U-Boats had been damaged by the Trinidad based aircraft and 1943 was to bring their reward. In March, a VP-53 Catalina out of Chaguaramas carried out a textbook attack on the U-Boat U156, just east of Trinidad. The U156 was the top scoring Caribbean boat, but by the time Lt. John Drysden pulled his aircraft around for

a second attack, the U-Boat was in two pieces and there were no survivors. The month of June saw the U-Boats begin to hit back at their tormentors. Prior to this the U-Boats crash dived whenever they sighted an aircraft and the result of the encounter depended on the pilot's accuracy, but now they had orders to stay on the surface and fight it out with the aircraft. By the end of June, one Mariner from VP-205 had disappeared without trace and this was followed by a succession of fierce battles between Trinidad's aircraft and the U-Boats. Aircraft were being shot down, or returning to Trinidad badly damaged, with dead or dying crew on an almost daily basis.

The fight raged fiercest around Trinidad, but it was the last fling of the U-Boats. By the end of July, eight of them had been sunk, mainly by aircraft. Radar in each island effectively kept watch on the passages into the Caribbean and the U-Boats were being continuously tracked. In Trinidad, a radar set was mounted at La Lune on the south coast and another was located overlooking Blanchisseuse, covering the north coast. In Tobago, a radar set was mounted on the hill overlooking Charlotteville, giving coverage of the area between the island and Grenada. These sets were all air warning aerials, but they could be used for surface coverage, to detect the passage of the U-Boats. The Germans were beaten, but they had managed to sink nearly four hundred merchant ships and there was still one traumatic final battle to be fought.

On August 7th 1943, a VP-204 Mariner attacked U615 just after midnight, in the area northwest of Trinidad. The U-Boat commanded by Rolf Kapitsky was not damaged, but for the rest of that night the

Mariners harassed it with continual attacks. This forced Kapitsky to stay submerged and it was not until after lunch on the following day that he was able to stay on the surface long enough to charge his batteries. At one-thirty that afternoon, Chaguaramas received a signal from Mariner P-4 of VP-205, saying that they were attacking a U-Boat, in the same area. Nothing more was heard from the aircraft and no trace of it was ever found. In fact the aircraft had crippled U615 before being destroyed. The U-Boat was unable to dive and all the Germans could do was await their fate at the hands of the Trinidad based aircraft, but they prepared to sell their lives dearly. An hour later, the crippled boat was found by VP-204 Mariner. Frantic signals went out for assistance as the Mariner attacked and was set on fire by the U-Boat's guns. Mariners from VP-204 and VP-205, along with B18's from No. 10 Army Squadron and Venturas from US Navy bomber squadron VB-130 based at Edinburgh, began to converge on the U-Boat. Later airship K68 from ZP-51 at Edinburgh also arrived on the scene. There followed one of the greatest battles of all of World War Two between aircraft and a submarine. All afternoon they attacked in three's, the two outer aircraft trying to draw the U-Boat's fire, while the centre one did the bomb run. Kapitsky's boat fought back, although frequently bracketted by the enormous depth charge explosions. The U-Boat's gunners were often thrown into the sea by the force of the explosions, but each time they climbed back aboard to meet the next wave of attackers. Each time, the attacking aircraft would come out of their bomb runs with dead or dying crew and the wind whistling through great holes torn

in their machines. By nightfall, as U615 slipped into a concealing thunderstorm, both the U-Boat's crew and the aircrews from Trinidad were exhausted.

Kapitsky was dying on his conning tower and the dead and wounded were being taken from the aircraft as they landed in Trinidad, while the Airship ran out of fuel and was destroyed. At midnight, with dozens of fresh aircraft hunting for it, the battered U-Boat quietly slipped below the waves for the last time. At dawn next morning, the ships from Chaguaramas found the surviving Germans bobbing in the sea. The U615 was the last U-Boat lost in the Caribbean and with its loss, the US Navy were triumphant. There would still be other U-Boats in the Caribbean up to late in 1944, but the tables had turned and they were always on the defensive.

During 1943, twelve Trinidad and Tobago aviators died while serving with the RAF. Eight of them, including two DeMeillac brothers each flying a Stirling, were killed in bomber raids over Germany, while four died in fighters. Leslie Gilkes was one of these casualities, and he died over the city of Hamburg on the night of August 2nd when his Lancaster was caught by anti-aircraft fire. By 1944, all of the former ATS pilots, along with the many others who had enlisted in England, were on operations and as a result, fifteen of our aviators paid the ultimate price. Seven of them died in fighters, while the Allied Forces established command of the air over Hitler's Reich. J. Alcazar became our third naval pilot to die when his Avenger torpedo bomber crashed in Ceylon, while David Merry was killed as he held a crippled Oxford trainer steady, so that his students could bail out.

The survivors were making a considerable name for themselves. Ulric Cross was awarded a DFC in June 1944 after completing a tour as the navigator of a Mosquito bomber on night raids over Germany. Going back on a third tour to complete eight operations, he was awarded a Distinguished Service Order in November in recognition of his outstanding work as a Pathfinder. He was also offered a permanent position with the RAF but turned it down, electing to do law instead. He went on to a distinguished career in the legal profession in the Commonwealth spending a total of sixteen years in Ghana, Cameroon and Tanzania ending in Trinidad as a Judge of the High Court. Among other things Ulric Cross is now the Chairman of the Commonwealth Foundation with its headquarters in London. Tommy Meyers ended the war with an Air Force Cross (AFC), having flown close to one hundred missions and commanded three fighter squadrons. The unassuming John Carrington was just receiving a DSO, to add to his two DFC's, having completed his third tour flying with the 100 Group in the hazardous world of electronic warfare, as a decoy for the German night fighters. Horace Bowen ended his twenty-eight years in the RAF during 1944, retiring as an Air Commodore. Claude Vincent ended the European war as a Station Commander, with the rank of Group Captain, but he was by no means finished with the Air Force.

In Trinidad, 1944 saw even the Royal Navy begin to spill out of Piarco. No. 793 target towing squadron transferred from the overcrowded Piarco to Camden Field and added Albacores to their menagerie of aircraft. Late in 1944, Barracuda torpedo bombers arrived for No. 750 squadron, pushing the number of

aircraft at Piarco back over the two hundred mark. In the wake of all this activity, Piarco was the site of many spectacular aircraft accidents and as normal in wartime, many of them were fatal. One never to be forgotten crash involved a Grumman Goose flown by an American pilot and a Fleet Air Arm Albacore. Both aircraft ended up on the approach at the same time and different interpretations of the frantic red flares from the tower, led to the two machines colliding. They remained locked together and slammed into the threshold in a fiery inferno, where rescue teams could hear the screams of the seven aviators, but could do nothing to save them. In among the many military machines, BWIA, Pan Am, KLM, American Export Airlines and the Military Air Transport Command, continued operating and also had their occasional accident. One of these crashes occurred in June 1944 involved a Pan Am DC-3 which was destroyed in a crash on take-off. The co-pilot was catapulted through the cockpit roof hatch and the machine broke up.

At Carlsen Field, Hellcats, Corsairs, Avengers and Helldivers from the big carriers, thundered into the runways in simulated deck landings, while all around the coast of Trinidad, floating targets danced to the eruption of bombs and rockets. Overhead, the stately airships made their way to and from the patrol areas, mainly over the bauxite route. Relatively speaking, Waller Field was the quietest of the flying fields. The venerable B18s had been replaced by four engined B17s and B24 bombers as well as twin engined B25 Mitchells, but Waller Field was on the threshold of a veritable explosion of air activity. With the ending of the European war in May 1945, tactical air-

craft began leaving the island for the Pacific Theatre and Carlsen Field almost overnight slowed down to the transit of an occasional airship. But the United States had thousands of men to transfer from Europe to the Pacific and Project Green commenced. Troops had to be moved from Africa, across Natal in Brazil and then northwards to the United States. Commencing on June 1st, Waller Field became the transshipment centre and thirty transport squadrons moved into the field. Two hundred and sixty C-47s were based at the location and they began moving thirty thousand men per month through Trinidad. Waller Field became one of the world's busiest airfields, handling one aircraft every three minutes. Project Green ended in August 1945, by which time Waller Field had become world famous and its operation became a model for the later Berlin airlift.

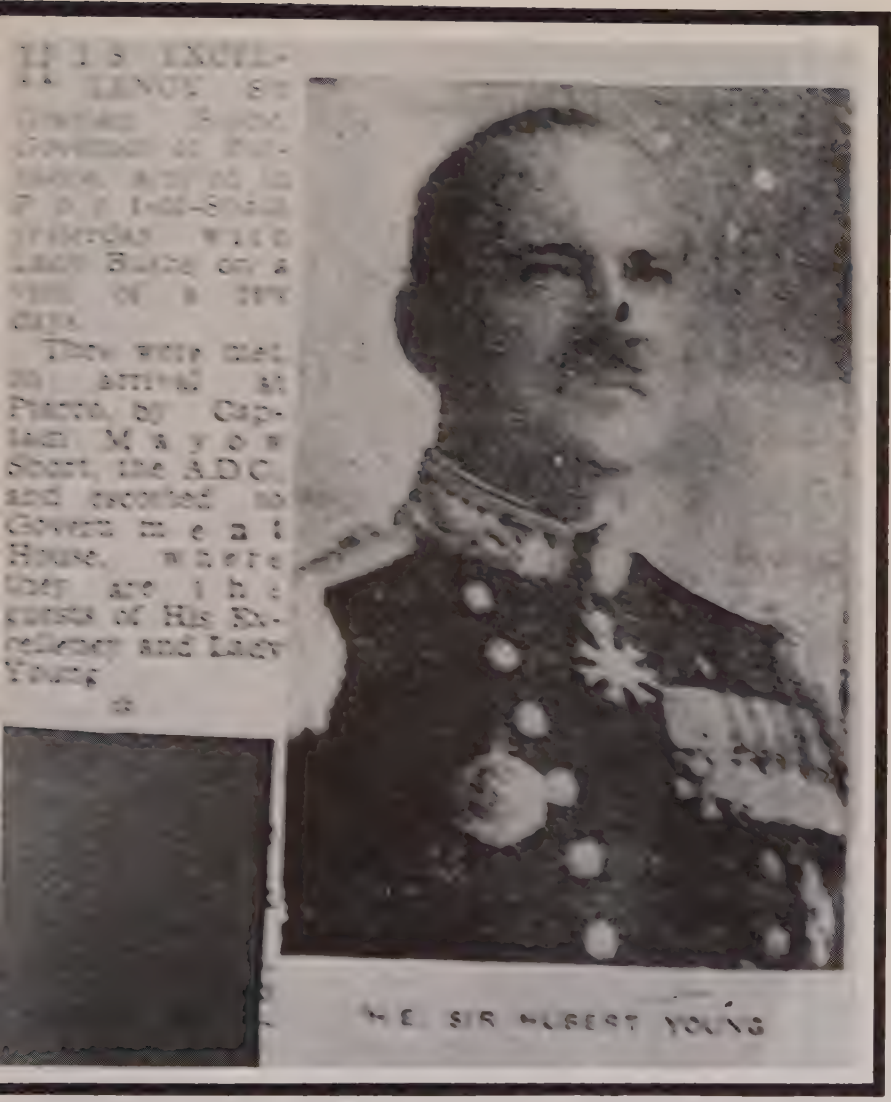
Even Toco airfield had its moment of glory, when a four engined B-24 Liberator bomber made an emergency landing on the tiny airfield. Despite the protests of the pilot, who felt that he could use the drop off the cliff at the end of the runway to gain flying speed, the machine was dismantled and moved to Waller Field. Piarco experienced a veritable holocaust when over a short period of time, eleven A20 light bombers carrying fuel in temporary belly tanks for the long flight to Brazil crashed on the runway. Without baffles in the tanks, the surge of fuel caused each landing to become a fiery disaster. Air traffic controllers, rescue teams and firemen, all had their share of practice.

October 1945 saw all four Fleet Air Arm squadrons at Piarco disbanded. With dramatic suddenness, RNAS Piarco and HMS Goshawk were no more.

Carlsen Field was closed, Camden Field was closed and almost overnight Trinidad became an aviation ghost town. Silent stood the runways, with the wind gently blowing the encroaching grass. Piarco and Waller Field were the only runways in use, but at a fraction of the movement of a year before. Trinidad and Tobago seemed condemned to aviation extinction, except for the fact that our aviators were coming home. They were bringing three DSO's sixteen DFC's, one AFC, one Order of Leopold and one DFM, more aviation wartime decorations than the rest of the Caribbean combined. Once again they had proved that Trinidad and Tobago aviators were among the best and they were coming home to breathe life into the silent airfields.

Plates

1940 – 1946



Excerpt from the Trinidad Guardian on His Excellency, Governor Sir Hubert Young Courtesy Trinidad Guardian.

His Excellency and Lady Young, in the Paddock at a Red Cross Fundraising Gymkhana in 1980. WIN, (West Indian Newsmag.)

Mayor Short in 1986. He was the Aide de-Camp to Governor Sir Hubert Young. Photo Lloyd Pierre Jr.

B.W.I.A.'s VP-TAW Vickers Viking, Crown Point Airport. Courtesy John Dobson.

Lowell Yerex, founder of B.W.I.A. seen in his office in New York in February 1941. Courtesy NASM Smithson Institute.

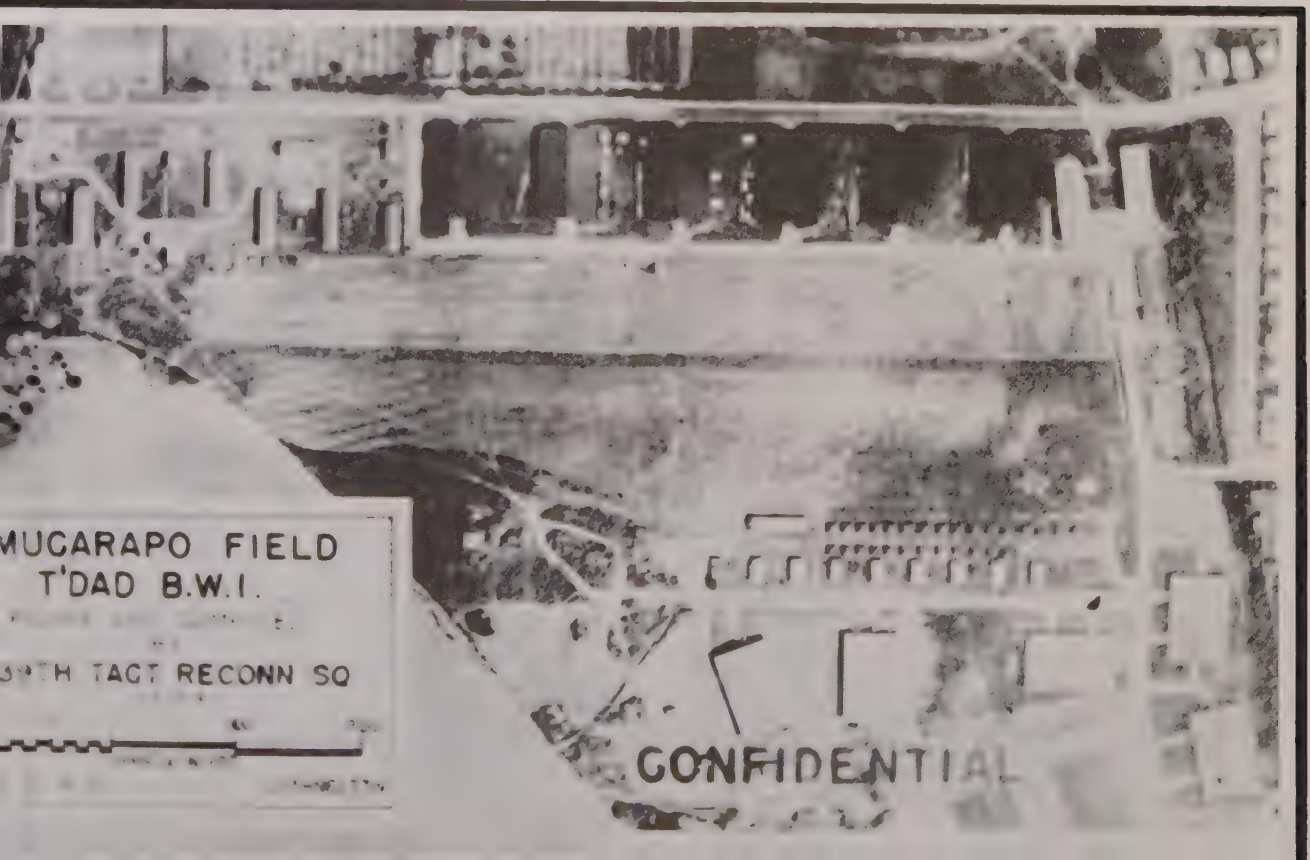
Crown Point Runway 1943. G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection.

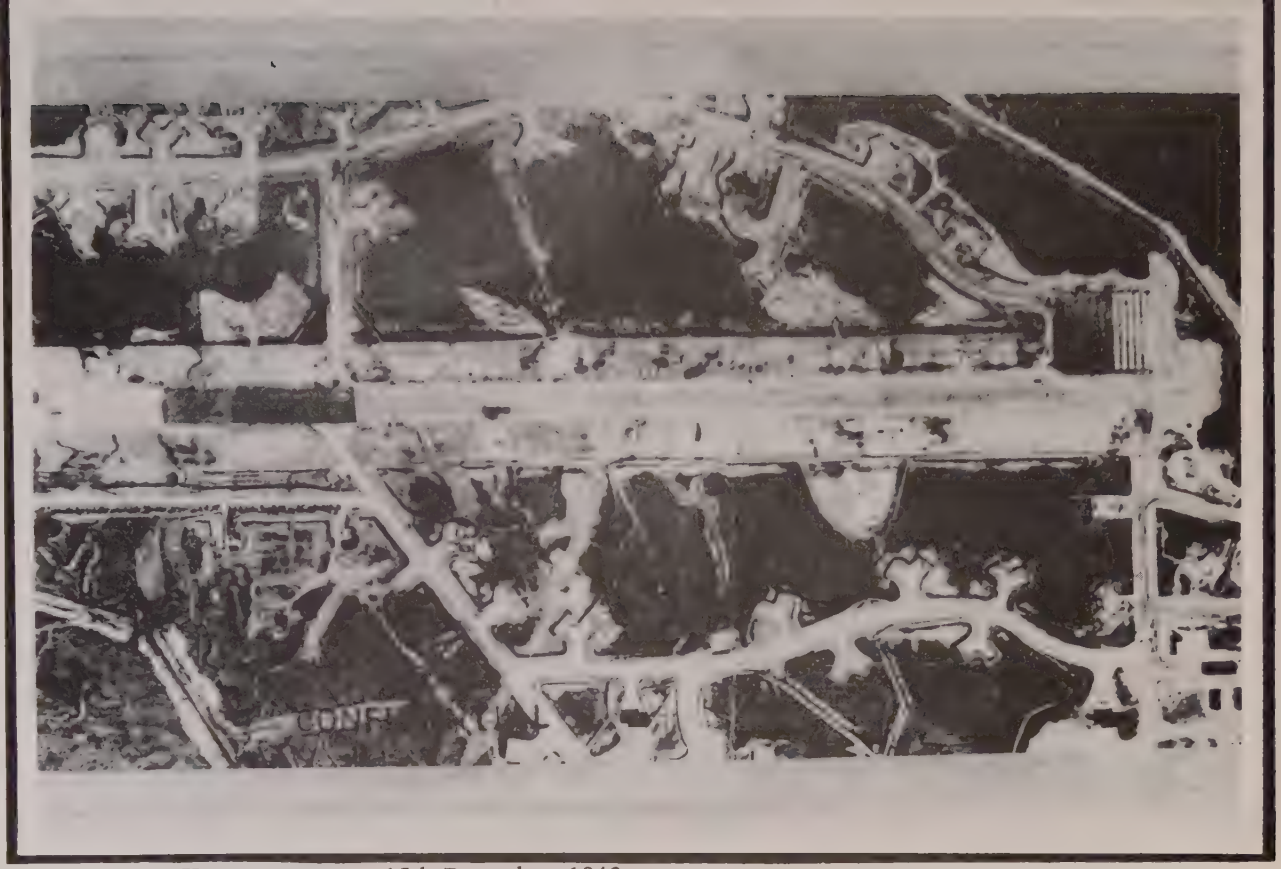
Blackburn "Roc", L3084 used for engine trials by Manufacturer. Courtesy Fleet Air Arm Museum.

No. 752 Reliants squadron, at Piarco in 1943. G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection.

Crown Point runway. Composite photograph, 28th July, 1943. G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection.

Mucurapo field on 1st December 1943.
Photo taken by the 39th Reconnaissance Squadron, U.S. Army Air Corps. G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection.



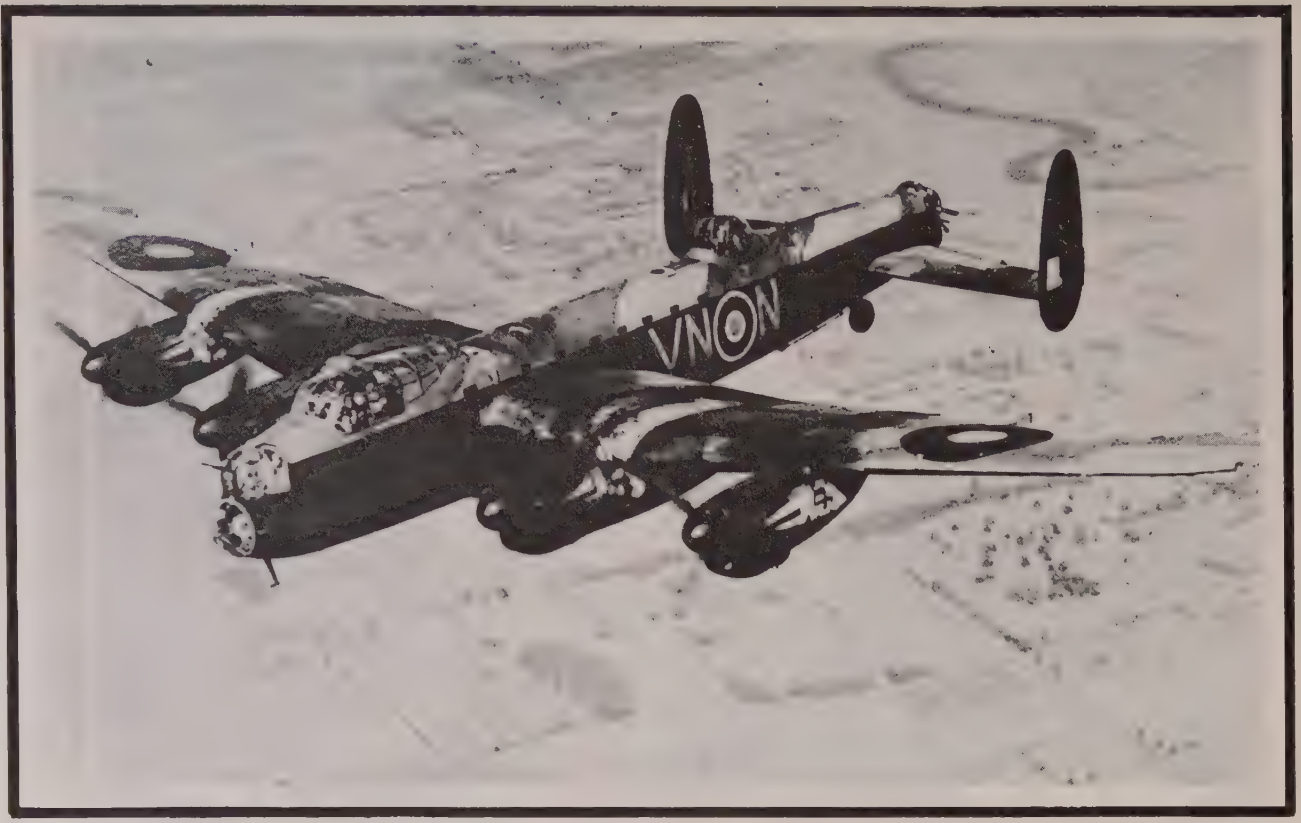


Xeres runway, on 15th December, 1943.
Photo taken by 39th Reconnaissance Squadron, U.S. Army Air Corps. G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection.

U.S. Navy K Type Airship K77 being prepared for take off from Carlsen Field in November 1944.
Courtesy ZP 51 squadron history, G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection.

Carlsen Field Blimp matt in 1944.
Photo courtesy U.S. National Archives and Records Centre. G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection.

Piarco Airport 8th January, 1944. Photo by 39th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron. G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection.



Lancaster Bomber. Copyright Real Photographs Limited, Church Street, Liverpool.
Courtesy Fleet Air Arm Museum.

Ulric Cross just after receiving his D.S.O. in November 1944, outside Buckingham Palace. Courtesy Ulric Cross

CHAPTER 8

THE AVIATION HUB OF THE CARIBBEAN

The year 1941 finally saw the responsibility for aeroplanes, airports, and air regulations vested in a separate and independent organisation, with the founding of the Department of Civil Aviation. The world of aviation in Trinidad and Tobago had outgrown the concept of grass flying fields, private aircraft maintained by their owners and pioneer pilots flying when and where they wanted. Indeed, at the formation of the department in 1941, there were over two hundred aeroplanes based in the island and by the mid-years of the war there would be up to six hundred machines. Although much of this aviation was military, they operated in and among civil aircraft with all the attendant problems regarding control. The carrying of passengers for hire and reward also demanded that all aviation be regulated in the interest of safety, with standards being set and pilot's licences being issued in accordance with the

requirements of the British 1919 Air Regulations.

Carl Agostini (eventually to become the first local Director of Civil Aviation) had first become involved in aviation in 1931 when he worked as a clerk with the short-lived Compagnie Générale Aeropostale and then gone on to work for Pan American at Cocorite, gaining considerable experience which he put to work for the new department under its first Director of Civil Aviation (D.C.A.) Mr. A Newark. By 1943, Agostini had been appointed Aerodrome Superintendent and had been joined in the department by Basil Flemming, Eric Patience and Michael Thomas. These first Trinidadians received their initial training at Piarco and later studied civil aviation operations courses in Canada. With some initial help from the navy, they took over air traffic control at Piarco and by the end of the war were handling more air traffic than Piarco was ever to see again, in an extremely hazardous mixed military and civil environment. To some extent this mixed environment still pertains to the present day as occasionally military aircraft make technical calls at Piarco.

1941 also heralded the arrival of the Americans who brought with them not only their technical skills, but their "Yankee" dollars as well, thereby helping to generate new jobs. The war stimulated both the agricultural and industrial (oil) sectors of the economy. A successful "grow more food" campaign launched by the Department of Agriculture helped to alleviate the food shortage brought about by the onset of the war.

Politically, mild constitutional changes occurred in 1941 and 1944 with the elected membership of both the Legislative and Executive Councils being

increased and nominated membership being decreased. This was only a small concession to those who had long advocated reform for the colony.

After the war, Chaguaramas Naval Air Station continued to operate although on a much reduced establishment with only one patrol bomber squadron VPB-213, which was based there with twelve Martin Mariner flying boats. With the formation of the United States Air Force, Waller Field became Waller Air Force Base and continued to be responsible for what became known as the Piarco Flight Information Region, an area that corresponded roughly to the wartime Trinidad Sector. Sargeant Cresswel and his team of USAF air traffic controllers handled all air traffic in the southern Caribbean, handing the aircraft over to the various airfield air traffic control units at their respective airports. Carlsen and Camden became Auxilliary Air Force Bases, although closed, while the other flying fields reverted to emergency use only and were left to decay.

In 1944, the post of Director of Civil Aviation passed to Wing commander Maurice Banks, who after the war guided the expansion of BWIA, the rebirth of the Light Aeroplane Club and the thorough training of Piarco's air traffic controllers. Although the European war ended in May 1945, seven Trinidad and Tobago airmen were to be killed during the year. Collins Joseph became the final casualty on the last day of 1945, when his Spitfire of No. 130 Squadron crashed near Aachen in Germany during the appalling winter weather, but even before this accident, the first local pilot had come home to BWIA.

Fernand Farfan, better known as Junior, had been a member of the second ATS class at Piarco in late

1940. After training at Peterborough and an Observers Training Unit (OTU) in England, he had been appointed to No. 601 County of London squadron and by early 1942, he was flying Spitfires in the Middle East. He was shot down by ground fire over the island of Crete in July of that year and successfully evaded capture to make his way several weeks later to Egypt. After two years as an instructor and Staff pilot in England he was posted in 1944 to No. 602 City of Glasgow squadron, which was based just inland from the Normandy beaches. Again flying Spitfires, he took part in the famous battle of the Falaise Gap, where British and American forces trapped the German armies, allowing the Allied tactical aircraft to wreak havoc. He was awarded the Belgian Order of Leopold and later transferred to No. 41 squadron which moved to Kastrup airfield near Copenhagen at the end of the conflict. While in Denmark, he led high speed aerobatic display teams of Spitfires and then converted to fly the Tempest V fighter. He arrived in Trinidad to fly with BWIA as a pilot.

Philip W. Kelshall had been studying Law at Cambridge on the outbreak of the war and teaming up with John Carrington, they decided to abandon their studies and join the RAF. Captain K as he came to be called had been flying since 1937 and the RAF decided that he could best be utilised as a flying instructor, which resulted in a posting to the RAF college at Cranwell. After training scores of pilots for the rapidly expanding force, he was posted in 1944 to No. 169 bomber support, flying Mosquitoes on night intruder missions in the dangerous world of No. 100 Group. After completing his tour, he served with No.

29 night fighter squadron, before returning to Trinidad in July 1946, to become the second Trinidadian pilot in BWIA.

He was to rise through the post of Check Captain, to become the first person from Trinidad and Tobago to be appointed as Chief Executive of the airline, when he was made General Manager in 1963. After leaving the airline in 1968, he continued to be closely associated with aviation, particularly Tobago services in the seventies. Captain K was quickly followed by Esmond Farfan (brother of Junior). Esmond had been trained with the fifth ATS class in 1941, then at Peterborough in England and went on to Canada for multi-engine training. Early in 1944, he had been posted to No. 12 squadron as captain of a mighty Lancaster bomber. He successfully completed his tour in the hazardous night skies over Germany and was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross, before transferring to No. 163 squadron to fly Mosquitoes. He arrived home in October 1946 to become the third Trinidadian pilot with BWIA, where he served for thirty-three years as captain of every type of aircraft used by the airline during that time.

Unlike the Trinidadian pilots of the First World War who had to stay in England if they wished to continue flying, the returning aviators from the second conflict could look forward to BWIA or the LAC, but the airline could only absorb a few of the many, and the majority had to be content with light aircraft. Many of our superb fliers had to try and fit themselves back into civilian life, but they all contributed to the rebirth of the Club. However, those that followed the first three and managed to get into BWIA, went on to contribute to building a company

that to date has an excellent safety record. In 1944 Lowell Yerex had been replaced by K.T. Murray and in the race to rebuild the world's airlines after the war, BWIA was unable to obtain the fourteen passenger Lodestars and were forced instead to purchase Lockheed 14's. These aircraft were converted Hudson anti-submarine bombers with only an eight seat capacity with baggage carried in the former bomb bays. Despite these setbacks, the airline began pioneering new routes to the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Belize. In 1947, ownership of BWIA passed to the short lived British South American Airlines, with A.D.S. Murray as General Manager and John Booth as Chairman, by which stage the airline had shed most of its Lockeed 14's and managed to acquire a fleet of Lodestars and Vickers Vikings.

The departure of the Fleet Air Arm in 1946 left the northern side of Piarco deserted, with a large number of hangars and other administrative buildings then believed to be far in excess of the airport's needs. Six of the large Belman hangars were dismantled and all the other wooden buildings were torn down. The Light Aeroplane Club moved into the easternmost remaining hangar, but its two original Tiger Moths had not survived navy use during the war. The returning pilots were all familiar with the British built Auster and the Club acquired two of the type. The Auster J1's were assembled and registered VP-TAR and VP-TAS.

Christened "Castor" and "Pollux", the two training planes were immediately put to good use by the once again blossoming Club membership. There was no shortage of flying instructors from among the returned airmen and late in 1948, Trinidad and

Tobago's first woman pilot Elizabeth Cabral received her licence.

By January of the following year, Yvonne Lange - daughter of Maurice Lange - and Ruth Weekes, had become the second and third licensed female pilots. The days of pioneering first flights were over, but Club pilots still managed to find interesting adventures, such as when Esmond Farfan, Keith Maingot, Neville Perriera, and Yvonne Lange, took two passengers in the Austers on the first flight from Trinidad to Martinique in 1948. In the meantime, Piarco had been developing.

In November 1946, the Governor - Sir Bede Clifford - made a speech to the Legislative Council in which he stressed the need to develop Piarco to be able to handle the largest aircraft then envisaged, as well as pointing out the fact that Piarco was the hub of Caribbean aviation. He indicated that the Government intended to allocate 5.5 million dollars towards this development. The Laventille and Mucurapo airport projects had finally been abandoned. The Churchill-Roosevelt Highway had been completed in January of 1944, vastly improving access to the airport and the Governor went on to speculate that the site earmarked for the Laventille airport could be used to lay down a highway, linking the existing highway directly to Port of Spain. Many years later, this idea developed into the Beetham Highway.

Elections were held in 1946 and these were the first to be held under Adult Franchise. There was a proliferation of political parties such as the Caribbean Socialist Party, and the Trinidad United Congress and eight out of nine seats were won by party candidates. Butler had been released from detention the previous

year and immediately returned to the political arena and soon formed another party the "Butler Party".

The plans in the Governor's 1946 speech began to take shape at Piarco in 1948. The two shorter auxiliary runways were seldom used and then only by light aircraft, which meant that development was concentrated on the main runway 09/27. To handle the new generation of turbo-prop airliners then on the drawing boards, Piarco would need an additional 243.9 metres (eight hundred feet), but this meant that the runway would once again cross the Golden Grove Road. To avoid constantly re-routing the road as the runway was lengthened, the decision was taken to completely abandon the eastern entry road to Piarco. An engineer named Hirst, on contract to the Department of Works, was given the job to modernise Piarco and his first priority was to construct a new road. BWIA had moved into the old Fleet Air Arm base on the north side of Piarco and occupied the four western hangars, but the old military road ended in the maintenance base. The facilities on the northern side of the road were removed and Hirst extended the road around the western end of the hangars, creating what became popularly known as "Hirst Corner". The new road then ran southward, to the west of the main runway threshold and then eastwards to the Terminal building. This is still the main road into Piarco, passing under the approach to the runway. Once the road was relocated, the main runway was extended eastwards to 1768.2 metres (five thousand eight hundred feet), allowing Piarco to handle the largest aircraft and leaving ample room for future expansion to the east.

Wing Commander Banks left the Department of

Civil Aviation in 1946, to be replaced by Carl Agostini, who acted in the position until 1947 when he became the first Trinidad and Tobago born Director of Civil Aviation. The year 1948 also saw the closure of the air traffic control facility at Waller AFB and control of the Piarco Flight Information Region passed to the Civil Aviation Department at Piarco. To handle this vastly increased responsibility, the department had been reorganised and was continually expanding. Piarco International Airport in the 1940's and 1950's was the responsibility of the Department of Civil Aviation and in turn the Department appointed a person called the Aerodrome Superintendent to manage the airport which was run on a twenty four hour basis. Air Traffic Control (ATC) was managed by the Operations and Senior Air Traffic Control Officer (OSCO) and the organisational structure of the Department was as follows:-

Director of Civil Aviation
|
Assistant Director of Civil Aviation
|
Aerodrome Superintendent
|
O S C O
| | | | | |
Air Traffic Control
(working in three's on a 5-shift system
with about 3 stand-by ATC's)

Basil Flemming was Aerodrome Superintendent with Eric Patience as Operations and Senior Traffic Control Officer, while under Michael Thomas, the controllers Sonny Boland, John Karamath, Uric

Auguste, Joseph Ramdass and Sam Bhagwansingh performed yeoman service. They were soon joined by two former naval pilots Donald Bain and Russell Rodriguez and later by James Ahwai, Ralph Crouch, and Winston Boardman. The expanded department provided a powerful team of professionals and they were destined to play an important role in Caribbean aviation.

In 1957, Carl Agostini was seconded as Director of Civil Aviation to the Dominican Republic for a year under the auspices of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). Basil Flemming acted for him in Trinidad, but on Agostini's return, Flemming was appointed as Director of Civil Aviation for the Windward and Leeward islands, a post which he held for many years. Additionally, Sonny Boland was sent to British Guiana to organise that territory's air traffic control. Later he teamed up with Winston Boardman to handle a similar project in Barbados. Three of these early pioneers of air traffic control, Eric Patience, James Ahwai and Ralph Crouch were to hold the post of Director of Civil Aviation in Trinidad and Tobago, each helping to establish Piarco as the hub of Caribbean aviation. The Department of Civil Aviation was also responsible for security arrangements at the airport. This was done with the employment of Estate Constables. The Department was also responsible for emergency facilities such as the Fire Brigade, and owned a fire truck which was manned by the Department's personnel.

During the war years, a L/MF range directional navigation beacon, associated with a powerful non-directional beacon, (NDB), had been established 6.4 kilometres (four miles) west of the threshold of run-

way 09. Another less powerful NDB was located near the Pan Am Guest House, for use during instrument approaches. A third very useful NDB was located at Galeota Point and in the days when Piarco's traffic was at its peak, aircraft could be held over Galeota, well away from the busy circuit and approach. In the 1960's, a VOR facility was established on the old Carlsen blimp matt and an ILS system was installed at Piarco. The advent of these modern systems saw the removal of the Galeota and Pan Am Guest House NDB's, as well as the directional range on the main beacon. The main NDB, which today stands alongside the Uriah Butler Highway (which forms part of the highway system linking north and south Trinidad), became one of the most powerful and reliable of all the Caribbean navigational facilities.

By this stage (1947-1948), the status of many of Trinidad's old runways was changing and surprisingly some new fields were being added. In September 1948, the USAF 91st Reconnaissance squadron with their B17 bombers left Waller AFB. For the next year and a half the old base only handled transitting aircraft, until 27th April 1950, when the base was formally closed. It remained abandoned until the Defence Force used it briefly in 1968, then the Caribbean Air Training Institute took it over in 1978, only to abandon it again in 1983. In 1986, while the southern runway had been turned into a motor racing circuit, the Defence Force took charge of the northern runway. Waller Field has proven to be a well-built aerodrome and despite its inclement weather, it may well be profitably employed again. The Light Aeroplane Club took over both the Carlsen and Camden Auxilliary Air Force bases as training

fields. The Club was responsible for the maintenance of Carlsen and many post-war pilots including many of the present BWIA pilots, learned to fly from this runway, until 1970 when the field was destroyed by piling gravel on it. Xeres to the south had long since been used by a road contractor and the VOR was on the airship base. Camden in the meantime, reverted to its pre-war name of Exchange and control of it passed to the crop-dusting industry which still uses it.

Mayaro Field lay unused until the advent of off-shore drilling on the east coast. The oil companies took control in the late 1950's and used it for a while, until the age of the helicopter doomed it to extinction. Today the forest has reclaimed Mayaro Field. The oil companies also built two new flying fields. A paved runway was laid down in Penal and another was constructed on the old Trinidad Volunteers rifle range at Point Fortin. Both these fields, like Mayaro, were extensively used until helicopters took over from fixed-wing aircraft, but by far the most curious airstrip in Trinidad was Union Field. In September 1930, the Goodwill Fliers landed at Union Field, but no aircraft used it after this. On 2nd March 1942, the Americans asked for and were granted the use of the area as a flying field. It is doubtful whether the Americans ever landed aircraft at this location and a year later in February 1943, they handed it back to the Government. Since that time no aircraft has used the facility and indeed it was converted into the Union Park horse racing circuit, but today it is still marked on the most modern aviation maps, as an airfield. Union Park has been an airfield for at least fifty years, without aeroplanes, or most people even knowing that it is so designated.

Today, Union Park serves as a reminder of the ongoing dream of a San Fernando airport. Countless proposals have been put forward over the years to actually have such a facility in the southern borough, the most recent of which were in 1986. In 1971, studies determined that thirty-seven percent of the Tobago traffic originated in the south. This led Leslie Samaroo and Phillip Kelshall to complete a plan for the siting of a San Fernando airport at Harmony Hall, which would link a similar airport near the Beetham Highway to Tobago, moving domestic air travel away from the international airport. No approval was forthcoming for the scheme and eventually it died. Once again in 1977, Charles Brash and Gaylord Kelshall got together on another survey for a southern airport to cater for the increased traffic of the oil boom and provide a general aviation overnighting and refuelling base. This project put the airport just southeast of Palmiste, but it suffered the same fate of all the other plans. Perhaps Union Field will remain on the maps until some day the dream of a San Fernando airport becomes a reality.

Of all the airfields, Mitchell Field is the least known and by far the most romantic. Bill Mitchell was the manager of the Pan American Guest House at Piarco, when in 1948 he organised a local syndicate to set up an airport hotel. A wooden building was purchased from the Americans at Fort Read dismantled and re-erected alongside the original pre-war LAC hangar, on the south side of the runway. The Bel Air Hotel resulted, and Trinidadian Sonny Hamid was brought in to manage it. The building incorporated the old hangar and today the top of this hangar

can be seen over the kitchen and service area of the hotel. When it was completed, Mitchell left Pan American and settled down to spend the rest of his life in Trinidad. He bought an estate in the Balandra area and decided that he could most conveniently get to and from his property by aircraft. To accomplish this he first obtained a pilot's licence with the Club and then constructed a grass flying field close to the sea in the Balandra Bay area. Naturally it became known as Mitchell Field. This airstrip was used exclusively by Bill Mitchell and it sometimes caused mild annoyance to other Club members, because when he took an aircraft to his property, it would stay there out of reach of other Club members, until he was ready to come back to Piarco. Nevertheless, Mitchell Field became a prominent check point for BWIA pilots on the Tobago run and was well known as the only flying field owned by an individual in the island. When Bill Mitchell died at the Bel Air Hotel in 1957, Mitchell Field was abandoned and the seventeenth runway to be constructed in Trinidad and Tobago was slowly reclaimed by the forest. Today, hardly a trace of it remains.

On 14th August 1952, Claude Vincent retired from the RAF as an Air Vice Marshall. By this stage our most famous aviator's decorations were CB, CBE, DFC and Bar, AFC and the Silver Star of Serbia. He had spent thirty-five years as a pilot and came home to become the Chairman of the Air Licensing Authority, Chairman of the RAF Association and was active in Caribbean aviation until his death in 1967. The same year that Vincent retired from the RAF, the LAC experienced its first fatal crash. Student pilot Harold Mc Cartney was killed and his ex-RAF

instructor John Lenigan was seriously injured, when the Auster VP-TAR was destroyed in a crash at Camden Field. A year later, Squadron Leader Ian Bourne was killed in a No. 64 squadron Meteor jet fighter at Dexford aerodrome in England. Bourne had been first trained as a pilot with the second ATS course and later been shot down flying a PRU Spitfire over Germany. Hardly another year went by before in September 1954, Pilot Officer Sumair Persad from Sangré Grande was killed in the crash of a Marathon four-engined training aircraft in England. He had left Trinidad as one of the post-war applicants for the RAF and had been appointed to No. 220 squadron flying Shackleton MR1 aircraft, before his tragic death. While these airmen were giving their lives in the quest to push the frontiers of aviation ever outwards, important developments were taking place at Piarco and in BWIA.

In 1956, Pearl Marshall joined BWIA to become the airline's first black air hostess. Not only was she the first in BWIA, but she was also the first black hostess to fly internationally with the world's airlines. She recalls the stringent requirements that were then in force as ones that kept the BWIA girls trim and looking smart. After working as an air hostess for five years, she became the airport representative for the airline at JFK International Airport in New York. This was a new position as previously no such post had existed. In this new capacity she acted many times as an intermediary between the American Customs and Immigration and newly arrived West Indian immigrants. Pearl Marshall returned to Piarco in the early nineteen sixties where she became the special representative handling VIP's and protocol as

no services of this sort had yet been set up by the government of newly-independent Trinidad and Tobago. Pearl Marshall-Beard (as she is now known) has come full circle and is now into her second term as a Board member of BWIA. She was a trail-blazer for the many to follow and her appointment as the first black air hostess mirrored the changes that had taken place in BWIA. In 1950, St. Kitts born John Rahr had become the General Manager, with Sir Errol dos Santos as Chairman, after the ailing British South American Airlines had been absorbed by BOAC. A year later BWIA became a limited liability company registered in Trinidad, as a subsidiary of BOAC. The change in ownership also reflected a change of equipment when in 1952 the airline acquired DC-3's to operate into the smaller airfields, while its Vikings extended the route structure to operate into Miami. In August 1955, the airline's first Vickers Viscount turbo-prop airliner VP-TBK arrived at Piarco, having been flown from England by the brothers Fernand and Esmond Farfan. The acquisition of this modern type aircraft now allowed BWIA to effectively compete on the New York route, but the groundwork for this technical maintenance ability had been laid long before.

In 1942 when the ATS closed, Frank Fuller transferred to BWIA to become the first Trinidad-born engineer with a locally issued licence to work with the airline. Fuller returned to the LAC after the war, but in BWIA he had been joined first by Francis Accoo and then Mr. Mohan Singh, who in time was to rise to become the airline's Chief Inspector and Chief Engineer. Edgar Borde, Frank Thomas and Jim Best also joined at around this time, along with

George Sheppard and Harry Cadiz, who came from Pan American with US licences. These were the early engineers who provided the technical expertise that BWIA relied on to establish its outstanding record, but they were all students of a remarkable man. Bill Brown an Englishman, had fallen in love with Trinidad and after the closure of the ATS he had become the instructor and mentor to Trinidad's aircraft engineers. He was tireless in his efforts to establish the highest standards and provide the best possible training for the local engineers. After the war he visited England briefly, before returning to Trinidad as the representative of the Air Registration Board (ARB) and took over as the maintenance surveyor and inspector, ensuring the technical excellence and rigid quality control that the airline needed in its transition to the jet age.

In the meantime, Piarco airport had been further expanded in 1954, when the main runway was extended eastwards to 2378 metres (seven thousand eight hundred feet,) allowing it to cater for the bigger and faster aircraft being used by the airlines. In the early 1950's aircraft movement at Piarco was about 28 per day, but in the 1960's this doubled to about 60. There were no landing charges for military and state-owned aircraft, but commercial airlines and private aircraft owners paid one cent per 0.5 square metres (five square feet) after the grace period of 24 hours free parking. The number of passengers using Piarco aerodrome in 1955 was a staggering 108,277. Piarco was keeping pace with the changing aviation world, but Crown Point appeared to be forgotten.

This runway was still the 1524.3 metres (five

thousand foot) grass field that had been laid during the war, but the operation of heavier aircraft during the wet season caused problems. Rain water tended to collect in puddles and frequent aircraft operations tended to render the field almost unusable. It was a matter of policy to BWIA that all its aircraft needed to be able to operate into Crown Point and during the dry season this was feasible. However, in the wet season, the BWIA Station Manager John Dobson would have to take an old Zephyr motor car onto the runway and carry out trials. He would then signal his findings on the braking conditions to Piarco, who would have to decide on which aircraft type would do the service, dependent on its ability to stop in the distance available. There were no runway lights and for night operations a kerosene flarepath would have to be laid out. Even the Terminal was without lights until 1959. Prior to this motor car headlights would sometimes have to be used to provide enough light to handle passengers. Crown Point had no air traffic control at all until the latter half of the seventies and pilots were required to rely on knowledge of the airfield and clear visibility to land and take off safely. In spite of these setbacks Crown Point saw an increase in passenger traffic in 1955 to 16,276 as compared to 7,588 passengers in 1948, and an increase in aircraft movement as well. In 1948, the toal number of aircraft movements were 998, but by 1955 this had increased to 1938. However, it is a tribute to the ability of the pilots that during those long lean years Crown Point never saw a serious accident. Why Crown Point was so neglected is difficult to understand. It may be that Crown Point was not accepted as the best aerodrome site for Tobago and as such

there was hesitation in spending money on a field that would soon be condemned. Over the years there were always plans for the improvement of the field, but somehow they all died. When Eric Patience was director of Civil Aviation (DCA), plans for a new airport in the lowlands and Friendship Estate area were well advanced. The project would have given Tobago a runway with potential for expansion, but once again the plan was shelved. Tobago had to wait until 1959 before the first tentative improvements began.

In the wider world of aviation, Trinidad and Tobago aviators were still prey to the hand of fate as the frontiers were pushed ever outwards. In 1956, the LAC lost another aircraft when an Auster was written off inside the Maracas Valley and miraculously, the pilot walked away. A year later Squadron leader Michael Alston was killed while flying as a Test Pilot in a Canberra jet bomber from Boscombe Down. That same year the Club lost another Auster when VP-TBV crashed at Carlsen Field and fortunately both pilots were unhurt. Two years later Lieutenant Charles Bushe, Senior Pilot of No. 891 Fleet Air Arm squadron was killed in a deck landing accident off the coast of Portugal, while flying a Sea Venom fighter from the aircraft carrier HMS Centaur. In the meantime, a new generation of young Trinidad and Tobago men were completing their flying training to become BWIA's third generation of pilots.

1956 was very important politically because it was the year in which the People's National Movement (PNM) led by Eric Williams was formed to contest the elections. These elections had been postponed

from 1955 to give the Constitution Committee time to report. Back in 1946 the elctions were followed by immediate agitation - led by men such as Patrick Solomon - for constitutional reform. This resulted in the 1950 constitution which sought to promote a quasi-ministerial system. The Legislative Council now had eighteen elected members and the Governor was eliminated as president of the Council to be replaced by a Speaker. In the elections of that year the Butler Party won 6 of the 18 elected seats contested, but received no portfolio in the Executive Council. The 1950 Constitution led to more agitation which resulted in the 1956 Constitution and the number of elected seats in the Legislative Council rose from 18 to 24. This laid the foundation for the country to move to internal self-government. The Party that gained a majority of seats in the Legislative elections could control the government.

At this time the Trinidad and Tobago public was witnessing the emergence of a dynamic young personality - the Oxford educated Dr. Eric Williams who was to head the government for the next twenty-five years until his death in March 1981. Today Dr. Eric Williams is considered by many to be the Father of the Nation. The PNM won thirteen out of the twenty-four seats contested and Governor Sir Edward Beetham instructed the two *unofficials in the Legislative Council to vote with the PNM. The PNM could also appoint two party members to nominated seats with the result that the party was able to gain the necessary majority and form the government.

**Prominent citizens appointed by the Governor to sit on either the Legislative Council or Executive Council.*

Meantime, Piarco was still host to numerous military aircraft such as the goodwill visit on No. 9 squadron Canberras in 1955 and the temporary basing on No. 58 squadron Canberras at Piarco in 1958. They were engaged in an aerial survey of British Guiana, but needed Piarco's longer runway. With them on this visit was a Trinidadian Flight Lieutenant, Mervyn Webb.

Webb had joined the RAF as a Colonial sponsored cadet in 1957. He underwent initial pilot training but because of an eye problem became a navigator and air electronics officer instead. In 1962 he was assigned the job of adjutant with No. 58 Squadron to carry out a photographic survey of a number of West Indian islands including Trinidad and Tobago. Again in 1964 and with the same squadron he returned in the same capacity to complete the survey. Webb joined BWIA in 1966 where he became involved in the training of a number of pilots from all over the West Indies. In later years he became Operations Manager of BWIA, a post he holds to this day. The Royal Navy also periodically returned to Piarco and during the visit of the aircraft carrier HMS Bulwark, the airfield resounded to the high pitched scream of the Sea Hawk jet fighters landing in pairs. The USAF used Piarco as a refuelling and overnight base for many of their aircraft transitting to and from South America and in particular, their giant Globemaster transports always created a stir. Many other South American military aircraft continued to flagstop through Piarco, but it was not until 1966 that a permanent military presence was re-established at the airport, when the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard based their first aircraft at the field. This coincided

with the final closure of the Chaguaramas Naval Station which had operated a single US Coast Guard Albatross Amphibian for a number of years.

By 1959 runway capacity and terminal building facilities at Piarco were beginning to slip behind the size and complexity of the aircraft that the airlines were bringing into service. The BWIA Viscounts and DC-3's were home based at the field and the facilities were just capable of handling them, but many other airlines were using Piarco. Pan American were now using their early Boeing 707's as a replacement for their old DC-7's, while KLM were beginning to operate the Douglas DC-8. Air France were also well into the jet age with Caravelles calling at Piarco. Aerolineas Argentinas were bringing in the sleek Comet IV and BOAC were replacing their aging Strato cruisers with Bristol Britannias and the occasional Comet IV. Linea Aeropostal Venezolana were landing regularly, displaying part of the name of Trinidad's first carrier, although few who saw the name realised the connection. Trans Canada, Aerovias Brazil and Leeward Islands Air Transport (LIAT) completed the lineup of seven airlines. Many of these new aircraft of the jet age were carrying over a hundred passengers and as Maurice Lange had predicted back in the 1930's, they were getting bigger, faster and far noisier, so not only was the Terminal too small, but the runway also needed to be lengthened. Both Piarco and Crown Point needed modern navigational facilities and the ramp needed to be greatly enlargened to cope with the large heavy aircraft that were frequenting the airports.

The improvements to Trinidad and Tobago's main airports were incorporated in a Government five-year

development programme that commenced in 1958 with work on a new Terminal building. It was an exciting time of change for both Piarco and Crown Point, with construction work in progress and new projects being inaugurated to change the face of both airports permanently. At Piarco, it was necessary to move the Terminal further from the runway to provide room for the big jets that were lining up at the old terminal and creating considerable congestion. The site for the new building was located southeast of the old building leaving an extensive area for development. While the new Piarco Terminal was being built, engineers moved in on Crown Point to extend and pave the runway. Work began in 1959 and by late 1960, the runway had been extended to 1981.7 metres (six thousand five hundred feet) and paved. Actually, the eastern end of the runway had been taken a little too close to the sea, with the result that after Hurricane Flora in 1963, cracks developed in the extension and the last 152.4 metres (five hundred feet) had to be condemned, leaving Crown Point with just 1829.2 metres (six thousand feet.) Lighting was also installed and an NDB was located on the point giving Tobago a twenty-four hour capability although still without air traffic control, or an adequate Terminal.

At Piarco, the main runway was again extended out to 2896.3 metres (nine thousand five hundred feet) with a 76.2 metres (two hundred and fifty foot) overrun, allowing the airport to handle any aircraft then in service. In 1983, this was further extended to 3201.2 metres (ten thousand five hundred feet) with a 152.4 metres (five hundred foot) overrun, putting Piarco in line with the world's largest air-

ports. In the meantime, work began on an extensive parking apron in 1961, which when completed provided ten aircraft parking positions with underground refuelling systems, able to accomodate any aircraft. Initially Shell and Regent Distributors (Trinidad) Ltd. supplied the aircraft with fuel but this was taken over by Esso and Texaco. Refuelling of aircraft was done either by trunks or from underground fuelling tanks. Lighting systems included runway lights, approach lights and ramp lights. These lights were maintained by the Works Department's electrical branch. Air Traffic Control procedures were guided by the standard and recommendations of ICAO. The Department used PYE equipment with communications between pilot and ATC being on a ground to air basis. But communications between Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean was done by International Aeradio on behalf of the Department. The Department of Works did all maintenance Work at the airport with the help of about thirty attendants employed by the Department.

During the same year 1961, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago bought BWIA for 2.2 million dollars (TT) and under the Chairmanship of first Sir Hugh Wooding and later Sir Patrick Hobson, agreements were concluded with BOAC, which allowed the airline to lease high performance aircraft to effectively compete on the New York run, until P.W. Kelshall overseered the arrival of the airline's Boeing 727's in 1965. LIAT in the meantime was operating de Havilland Herons and Beachcraft Bonanzas as a subsidiary of BWIA on the old DC-3 island routes.

By 1962, although the new Terminal was not one hundred percent complete, it was in use. At last air-

port services such as the Meteorology department, which had started during the war years, were properly accommodated. The building was able to offer extensive accommodation to the airlines using Piarco, with adequate arrival and departure areas, including a covered passenger finger providing protection from the weather and jet blast. It was sad to see the old passenger terminal go, but the march of progress at Piarco left no room for sentiment. Piarco's fourth Terminal Building was ready in time for the Independence of Trinidad and Tobago on the 31st August 1962, and along with its ramp and extensive runway, it justified the name Piarco International Airport. Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal officiated at the opening ceremony.

The best airport in the Caribbean, in fact the hub of the Caribbean, was ready for the jet age, with room to expand in any direction and cope with any development in the world of aviation.

Plates

1948 – 1986

Piarco Airport, June 15th 1948, VP-TAS. Left to Right:- Esmond Farfan, Hélène Majani, Keith Maingot. Courtesy Yvonne Lange, copyright Trinidad Guardian.

Left to Right:- Neville Pereira, Etienne Majani, Yvonne Lange. Piarco June 15th 1948, flight to Martinique. Courtesy Yvonne Lange, copyright Trinidad Guardian.

Left to Right:- Carl Agostini, Albert Gomes, Esmond Farfan, at Piarco International Airport.
Courtesy Esmond Farfan.

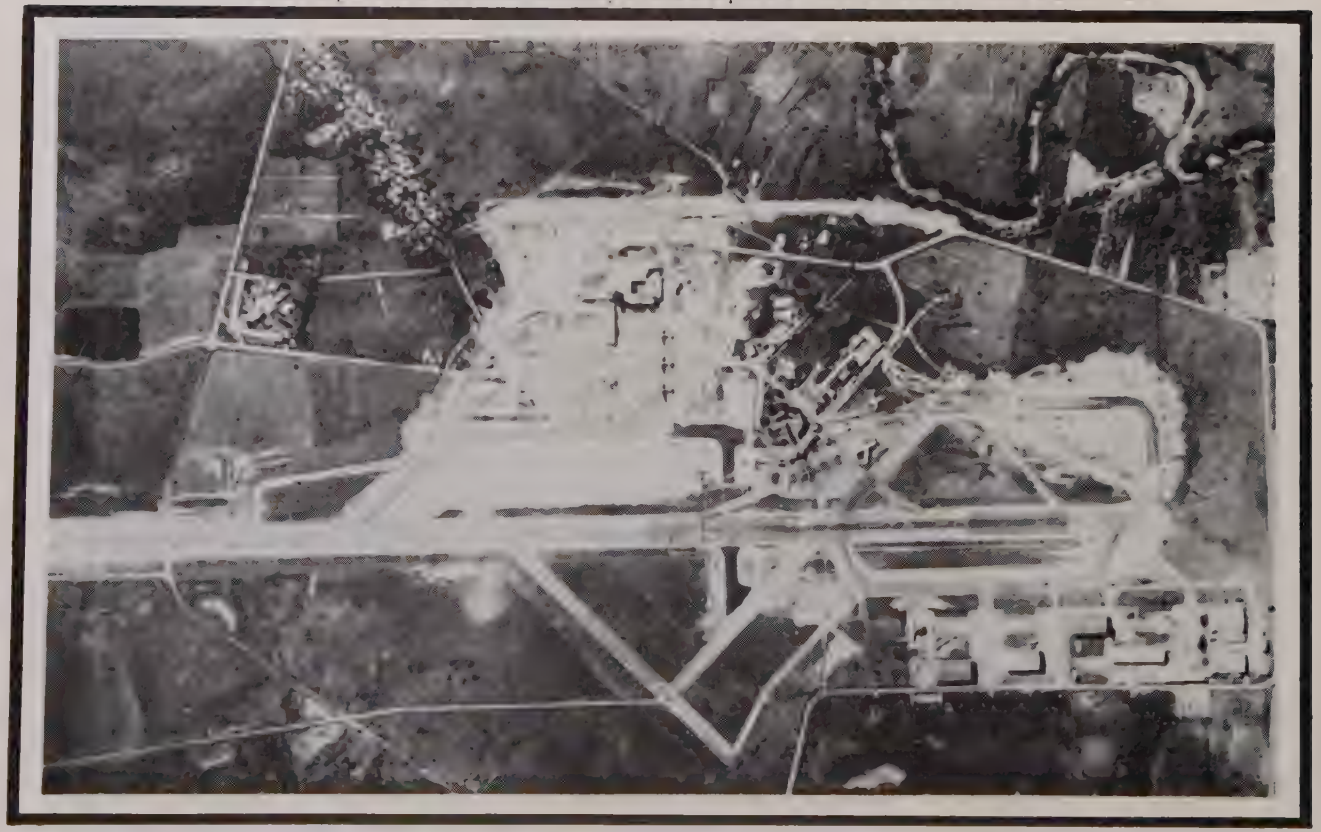
Piarco International Airport circa 1950 Courtesy Albert Jameson

B.W.I.A. Viscount VP-TBK in 1955. Courtesy Esmond Farfan.

Pearl Marshall. BWIA's first black air Stewardess.
Courtesy Pearl Marshall-Beard.

Douglas DC-3. Courtesy Douglas A/C Company.

Piarco Airport 1960. Photo taken by No. 58 Squadron RAF. G.T.M. Kelshall's Collection

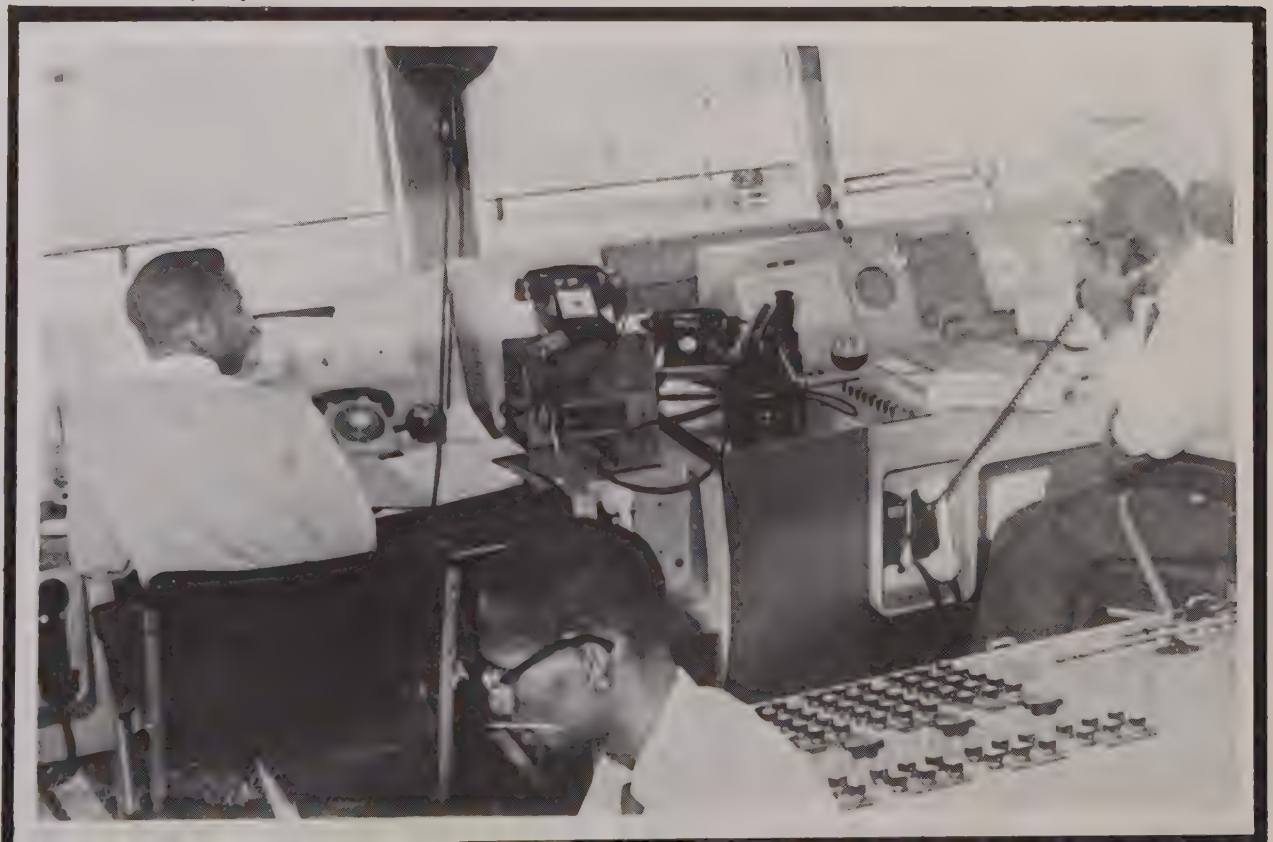


In foreground The Light Aeroplane Club building in 1986, note in background W.W. II hangar.
Photo by Lloyd Pierre Jr.

"The Inherent Nobility of Man" — Mural by Carlisle Fenwick Chang. Commissioned in 1959 for the opening of the new Piarco International Airport Terminal in 1962.
Photo courtesy Carlisle Fenwick Chang

The Main Concourse at Piarco International Airport, shortly after it was opened in 1962.
Courtesy Ralph Crouch.

From left to right George Livingstone, George Thornhill and Ralph Crouch in the Control Tower at Piarco International Airport after Air Traffic Control moved to the new terminal
Photo courtesy Ralph Crouch.



The new Piarco International Airport Terminal in 1962. Taken from the airside.
Photo courtesy Ralph Crouch.

Eric Patience in 1986 — The oldest living local Director of Civil Aviation (1956-72). Photo Lloyd Pierre Jr.

A front view of Bel Air Hotel in 1986. Photo by Lloyd Pierre Jr.

The L10 11 Tri Star – One of Trinidad and Tobago (BWIA International) Airways Corporation's wide-bodied aircraft at Piarco International Airport in November 1986.
Photo by Lloyd Pierre Jr.

The Supersonic Jet — "Concorde" — during a technical call paid to Piarco International Airport in February 1986. Photo by Lloyd Pierre Jr.

EPILOGUE

In 1958 the government of Trinidad and Tobago proposed an elaborate economic programme which was designed to improve the infrastructural facilities of the nation. This grandiose economic plan was known as the first Five Year Development Programme. The development of Piarco Airport was earmarked in this plan, as the government sought to develop Piarco into a first rate international airport by correcting the deficiencies which existed. This programme was to endure until 1962. Improvements at Piarco Airport included improvements to the runway, installation of night landing facilities and flight equipment and the construction of a new Terminal Building.

In time, construction of a new Terminal Building was of utmost importance. The previous terminal building had been rebuilt in 1942 and by the late 1950's it proved most inadequate for the volume of aircraft movements and passenger traffic, using the airport. In addition, the site of the Terminal was proving a hazard to aircraft due to its proximity to the runway. Moreover, the cost of maintaining the wooden structure was very prohibitive and temporary extensions proved insufficient for keeping pace with the great strides being made in civil aviation. As a result, the sum of $2,000,000.00 was allocated for the construction of a new Terminal building.

Next on the list of priorities of improvements at Piarco was an overhaul of the existing drainage system and the strengthening of the runway. When the runway was first constructed, it was expected to facilitate the landing of aircraft weighing 13,636.3 kilograms (30,000 pounds) to 18,181.8 kilograms (40,000 pounds) with a single wheel loading of

approximately 1.03 bars (15 pounds per square inch). But at present (1958) aircraft weighing over 90,909 kilograms (200,000 pounds) with a single wheel loading of up to 3.46 bars (50 pounds per square inch) land at the airport. With the future tendency towards larger and heavier aircraft, it has become imperative that the present runway be strengthened to be capable of handling aircraft with a single wheel loading of 4.15 bars (60 pounds per square inch). In addition to strengthening the runway, an improved drainage system will be constructed and night landing facilities will be installed shortly, to bring the airport up to the required international standards.

AVIATION	CAPITAL 1958/62 PROVISION	CAPITAL 1958/62 EXPENDITURE	MAXIMUM RECURRENT
PIARCO – Runway Strengthening	450,000	50,000	–
PIARCO – Night Landing Facilities	75,000	75,000	–
PIARCO – Flight Control Equipment	100,000	–	–
PIARCO – Terminal	2,000,000	600,000	–

Also included in this first Five Year Development Plan for 1958-62, were improvements to the Crown Point Airport in Tobago. According to the plan, the present airport in Tobago can only be used during the daytime as there is no night landing equipment. Provisions were made for improvements to the grass runway, drainage system and remodelling the Terminal Building, in an attempt to bring Crown Point

in line with international airports' standards. In 1958 $160,000 will be spent on development works at Crown Point airport.

AVIATION	CAPITAL 1958/62 PROVISION	CAPITAL 1958/62 EXPENDITURE	MAXIMUM RECURRENT
TOBAGO – Night Landing Facilities	120,000	70,000	–
TOBAGO – Runway Improvements	100,000	50,000	–
TOBAGO – Terminal	40,000	10,000	–

YEARLY PROGRESS REPORTS

1958 — 1962

1958 PROGRESS REPORT ON PIARCO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

ITEM	PROVISION for 1958	ACTUAL EXPENDITURE 1958	PARTICULARS
Runway	100,000	76,124	Runway strengthening to facilitate larger and heavier aircraft.
Night Landing Facilities	75,000	47,520	New lighting system installed.
Flight Control Equipment	Nil	Nil	Equipment ordered.
Terminal	445,000	86,382	Contract awarded in August to Fridal & Mitchell. Work began in October. By the end of December the first phase of construction was well under way.
Fencing	155,000	Nil	Tenders to be submitted in December.

CROWN POINT AIRPORT

Night Landing Facilities	70,000	Nil	Survey and drawings completed in August, and tenders submitted in September.
Runway Improvements	50,000	Nil	Survey carried out and provision of drawings and specifications completed.
Terminal	10,000	Nil	Preliminary plans have been prepared, but actual work will begin in 1959.

1959 PROGRESS ON PIARCO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

ITEM	PROVISION For 1959	ACTUAL EXPENDITURE 1959	PARTICULARS
Runway Strengthening	350,000	350,000	A system of partial re-surfacing commenced and a strip 91.4 metres (300 feet) long was carpeted to a thickness of 0.15 metres (6 inches).
Night Landing Facilities	10,000	10,000	Equipment installed and the $10,000 provision was retention money for contractors.
Flight Control Equipment	20,000	20,000	Equipment ordered.
Terminal	800,000	800,000	By the end of 1959 new Terminal should be near completion.
Fencing	155,000	–	To alleviate the danger caused by animals in the Airport area, tenders have been invited and this project will be initiated with the minimum of delay.

CROWN POINT AIRPORT

Night Landing Facilities	600,000	600,000	No work undertaken in 1958, but in 1959, plans to initiate and complete the work of installation of the facilities, making it possible for night use of the airport.
Runway Improvements	90,000	90,000	At present, soil test and levels are being made and the system of drainage is being undertaken to improve the stability of the sub-soil.
Terminal	Nil	Nil	
Airport	500,000	500,000	To re-surface and strengthen the Airport to accommodate aircraft of the Viscount size at all times and in all weather conditions.

1960 PROGRESS REPORT ON PIARCO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

ITEM	PROVISION For 1960	ACTUAL EXPENDITURE 1960	PARTICULARS
Runway Strengthening	364,048	364,048	In 1959 work was carried out on strengthening the main Runway, Apron and Shoulders. The 1960 provision is for continuation of this work and for sealing the Shoulders.
Night Landing Facilities	–	–	Retention money for contractors paid in 1959.
Flight Control Equipment	52,000	52,000	Purchase of equipment required to control aircraft movement in the control area.
Terminal Building	2,500,000	–	Funds are for the completion of Terminal and part of the construction of the Apron.
Fencing	10,000	10,000	Fencing the perimeter of Airport completed in 1959. Funds provided as retention money.
Runway Extention	480,000	480,000	Extention of main runway to 2896.3 metres (9,500 feet).

CROWN POINT AIRPORT

Night Lighting	80,000	80,000	In 1959 a contract was awarded and a start was made on the installation of these facilities. The 1960 provision is far the completion of the project.
Runway Improvement	600,000	600,000	Estimate increased to provide for the construction of a Runway 1981.7 metres (6,500 feet) long to accommodate aircraft with a maximum isolated wheel load of 18,181.8 kilograms (40,000 lbs). Work started in 1959 and work is to continue in 1960.

1962 PROGRESS REPORT ON PIARCO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

ITEM	PROVISION For 1962	ACTUAL EXPENDITURE 1962	PARTICULARS
Runway Strengthening	200,000	200,000	For continuation of works on runway strengthening, also strengthening of Taxiways & Shoulders.
Flight Control Equipment	20,247	20,247	For the purchase of essential equipment for controlling aircraft movements in the control area.
Terminal C.D. & W Scheme D. 3726	2,911,786	2,911,786	To provide for increased wage rates and partly for the electrical services required for the Apron and its appurtenance-sub-station. Also for installation of conveyor belt and as payment to contractors.
Fencing	30,000	30,000	For additional fencing and gates as Apron is completed.
Runway Extension	91,000	91,000	Due mainly to increased wage rates. Extension to 2896.3 metres (9,500 feet) completed.

CROWN POINT AIRPORT

Night Landing	41,313	41,313	Provision revised for increased labour rates. 1962 provision is to allow for completion of existing work and for payment in connection with the lighting on the Runway Extension.
Runway Improvement	500,000	500,000	During 1961 construction of drain on the main runway was continued and surfacing of runway was commenced. Provision is for continuation of works.

DRAFT SECOND FIVE YEAR PLAN 1964 – 1968
TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

An analysis of the first Five Year Development Programme indicates that between 1959 and 1961, the number of flights recorded at Piarco International Airport increased from 8,529 to 11,438. This was coupled with a corresponding increase in the number of passengers from 131,501 to 255,985. In addition, over the past few years, air cargo has been entering the country in increasing quantities each year rising from 2270.5 tonne (2230 tons) in 1957 to about 3054.5 tonne (3,000 tons) in 1961.

In 1962, the new Terminal Building was officially put into use, since which time work has been continuing on the incompleted items. Construction of a new Apron began in 1961 and was completed in 1963. This Apron provides parking for ten (10 aircraft in addition to a number of taxiways. The finger was also completed and affords passengers protection from the weather and also from jet blast. The main runway was extended to 2896.3 metres (9,500 feet) and would now be able to accommodate the largest aircraft in use.

Additionally, every type of convenience has been installed including an underground refuelling system, improved electrical services and emergency stand-by electric plant and improved night landing facilities. There are also a modern conveyor belt system for baggage handling, beauty salons, restaurants and bar, banking and postal facilities.

Except for minor improvements to the runway and the construction of a transit shed for air cargo, no significant work has been scheduled at Piarco in

the new five year programme.

CROWN POINT AIRPORT – This project was started in 1959 and work was mainly confined to the paving of the runway over a total distance of 1981.7 metres (6,500 feet) and the provision of lighting facilities and radio navigational aids for operations on a 24-hour basis. Practically all of the work scheduled has been completed and only minor works are proposed for implementation under the new five year programme.

GLOSSARY

ADC – Aide de Camp – a military aide.

AFB – Air Force Base

AFC – Air Force Cross – Awarded for outstanding achievement in the field of aviation.

Aileron – Aircraft control surface that controls movement in the rolling plane. Ailerons are normally mounted at the outer ends of the trailing edge of a wing near the wingtips. One aileron is deflected up, the other down creating a different lifting force on the wings thus contributing to the rolling movement.

AIR BOARD – Eventually became the Department of Civil Aviation in 1941.

ATS – Air Training Scheme – Part of the Empire Air Training Scheme set up in several member countries of the British Empire to train prospective pilots for the RAF.

Bar – A Bar issued in place of a second medal of the same type. Rather than wear two identical medals, the recipient wears the Bar across the original medal.

Bomron – US abbreviation for bombardment or bomber squadron.

DFC – Distinguished Flying Cross – Awarded for outstanding courage and ability in aviation combat.

DFM – Distinguished Flying Medal – Awarded to non-commissioned ranks for achievement equivalent to the DFC.

DSO – Distinguished Service Order – Awarded for outstanding courage and ability in any military field. It is the second highest British military decoration for gallantry.

Elevators – Aircraft control surface that controls movement in the vertical plane. Located on the horizontal stabilizer at the rear of the aircraft. When the elevator is deflected upward there is negative lift at the tail, causing the nose of the airplane to rise.

ICAO – International Civil Aviation Organisation.

ILS – Instrument Landing System – An electronic guidance system to assist pilots landing aircraft. It is composed of two ground based components and appropriate airborne equipment which identify for the pilot, an approach path that is in exact alignment with the runway centreline and descent angle of approximately 3 degrees.

LAC – Light Aeroplane Club – Full name: The Light Aeroplane Club of Trinidad and Tobago.

MC – Military Cross. Awarded to pilots when the RFC was part of the British Army. The DFC replaced it on the formation of the RAF.

M/LF – Medium and Low Frequency radio transmissions. Used with long range navigation systems.

NDB – Non Directional Beacon – A low-frequency navigation facility transmitting a signal and morse code identification to which aircraft can tune to determine the direction of the beacon in relation to the aircraft.

No Man's Land – The strip of land between the opposing armies during the First World War. No man's land extended from the Belgian town of Nieuport for four hundred miles, to the Swiss border.

ORDER OF LEOPOLD – Belgian Order for gallantry.

OTU – Operational Training Unit. The unit that trains pilots on the aircraft and in the tactics that they will be expected to used in combat.

Pathfinders – Specially selected aircraft crews who went in ahead of the main bomber streams, to mark the targets with flares and guide the aircraft doing the bombing.

PRU – Photographic Reconnaissance Unit – Specially equipped aircraft that provide target pictures before and after attacks.

RAF – Royal Air Force – Formed from the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) on 1st April 1918.

Revetment – An embankment around an aircraft parking area used to disperse and protect individual aircraft.

RFC – Royal Flying Corps – Forerunner of the RAF, formed on 13th May 1912.

RNAS – Royal Naval Air Station – Up to 1st April 1918, the letters were used to designate Royal Naval Air Service.

RNR – Royal Naval Reserve. "A" after the letters designates an aviator.

TRNVR – Trinidad Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve – Formed in 1940 in Trinidad with the majority of the officers and men from Trinidad and Tobago.

USAF – United States Air Force – Formed on 18th September 1947 out of the US Army Air Corps.

VB – US Navy designation for a land based bomber squadron.

VOR – A Very High Frequency Omni-Directional Range facility which transmits a raidal pattern through 360 degrees, producing 360 separate tracks or radials that can be used by a pilot to fly to or from the VOR station.

VP – US Navy designation for an anti-submarine patrol squadron, usually of flying boats.

VPB – US Navy designation for an anti-submarine patrol bomber squadron. Most VP squadrons were re-designated VPB in 1944.

ZP – US Navy designation for lighter than air squadrons using airships, commonly called "Blimps".

09/27 – The magnetic direction of the runway and its reciprocal. This changes as the earth's magnetic north pole moves. For example, Piarco's main runway started off as 09/27 in 1939 but by 1970 had changed to 10/28 indicating that the landing directions were 100^0 magnetic or the reciprocal 280^0 magnetic.

100 Group – A special organisation of RAF squadrons that conducted electronic warfare operations against night fighters. They jammed radars, trans-

mitted false information and often served as decoys to draw the night fighters away from the bombers. Some of the aircraft of this group operated over the German night fighter airfields where they would attack the night fighters while they were taking off or landing.

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AIRCRAFT INDEX

One hundred aircraft types are mentioned in the text of this book and many readers may not know them all. The following gives a brief listing of the types. The aircraft name is followed by the manufacturer's name and then the type.

A20 – DOUGLAS – Twin-engine light bomber called the Boston by the British and Havoc by the Americans.

Airships – ZEPPELIN – Graf Zeppelin. Large passenger airship that flew over Trinidad in 1934.

USN K. Type – Anti-submarine and patrol airship used in Trinidad by the US Navy.

Albacore – FAIREY – Single engine, three place, torpedo bomber with an enclosed cockpit. Used by the FAA at Piarco.

Albatross – GRUMMAN – Twin-engine, gull winged amphibian based in Trinidad by the US Coast Guard.

Anson – AVRO – Twin-engine coastal patrol and navigation training landplane, based at Piarco with 749 Squadron. Flown as a training aircraft by all the Trinidad and Tobago airmen on multi-engine training.

Auster – TAYLORCRAFT – Single-engine, fabric covered biplane used by the LAC as a trainer.

Avenger – GRUMMAN – TBF – Single engine, three place carrier borne torpedo bomber.

Avian – AVRO – Single engine, fabric covered biplane used by flying clubs and record breakers.

B17 – BOEING – Four engine, heavily armed, heavy bomber called the Flying Fortress.

B18 – DOUGLAS – Twin engined light bomber used exclusively in the Caribbean on anti-submarine duties.

B24 – CONSOLIDATED – Four engine, very long-ranged heavy bomber used in the Caribbean on anti-submarine duties.

B25 – NORTH AMERICAN – Twin engine medium bomber, used by both the British and Americans in World War II. Many based at Carlsen Field.

BE2c – ROYAL AIRCRAFT – FACTORY – Single engine, fabric covered, two seat observation aircraft. The first Trinidad and Tobago Airmen flew in this type.

Baldwin Red Devil – BALDWIN – Steel and wood framed, fabric covered wings, single engine early flying machine that performed the first successful flight in Trinidad.

Barracuda – FAIREY – Single engine, three seat torpedo bomber used at Piarco by the FAA.

Beaufighter – BRISTOL – Twin engine, two seat fighter and torpedo bomber, called the Whistling Death.

Blenheim – BRISTOL – Twin engine light bomber used by the RAF early in the Second World War.

The first two Trinidadians to die in the conflict were flying this type.

Boeing 707 – BOEING – Four jet airliner operated by Pan Am into Piarco with 181 seats.

Boeing 727 – BOEING – Three engine jet airliner used by BWIA with 131 seats.

Boland – BOLAND – Biplane designed by the Boland brothers employing the JIB control surfaces. The first aircraft in Trinidad was a Boland machine.

Bonanza – BEECHCRAFT – D50 Twin engine, six passenger general aviation aircraft used by LIAT.

Boston – DOUGLAS – British name for the A20 with a transparent nose.

Britannia – BRISTOL – Four engine turbo prop airliner used by BOAC on trans-Atlantic routes.

C-47 – DOUGLAS – Military version of the DC-3.

Camel – SOPWITH – Single engine, single seat, fabric covered World War I fighter.

Caberra – ENGLISH ELECTRIC – Twin jet, three crewed light bomber. The type visited Piarco in 1955, 1958 and 1960.

Caravelle – SUD AVIATION – Twin jet medium ranged airliner used by Air France with 80 seats.

Catalina – CONSOLIDATED – PBY, Twin engine, long ranged flying boat used on anti-submarine

operations. Some were based in Chaguaramas early in the war.

Channel – SUPERMARINE – Single engine, four seat, biplane flying boat used in Trinidad in 1921.

Commodore – CONSOLIDATED – Large four engine 32 passenger flying boat used by NYRBA on the South American route. A Commodore was the first aeroplane to fly to Tobago and land.

Corsair – VOUGHT – F4U, single engine, single seat naval fighter.

Curtis – CURTIS – F6C-2 single engine, two seat flying boat carried on USN ships, between the wars.

DC-2 – DOUGLAS – Twin engine airliner that served as the basis for the B18 bomber.

DC-3 – DOUGLAS – The classic twin engine airliner used by BWIA with 28 passenger seats.

DC-7 – DOUGLAS – Four engine airline used by Pan Am on its international services before the start of the jet age.

DC-8 – DOUGLAS – Four jet passenger airliner first used into Piarco by KLM.

Detroiter – STINSON – Single engine, high wing light aircraft developed from a mail plane.

DH-2 – DE HAVILLAND – Single pusher propeller, single seat fighter. The aircraft used by the first Trinidad and Tobago airman to shoot down an opponent.

DH-4 – DE HAVILLAND – Single engine, fabric covered, two seat biplane bomber.

DH-9 – DE HAVILLAND – Single engine, fabric covered, two seat biplane bomber developed from the DH-4. The DH 9A was a more powerful variant.

DO X – DORNIER – Giant twelve engine flying boat, built to offer maximum comfort to its passengers.

Dragon – DE HAVILLAND – Twin engine, biplane airliner capable of carrying six passengers.

FE 2b – ROYAL AIRCRAFT FACTORY – Two seat, fabric covered, biplane bomber version of the FE with a pusher propeller.

Fokker FXII – Anthony Fokker – Super Tri Motor, specially designed for KLM. Used on flights to Piarco.

Fulmer – FAIREY – Single engine, two seat fighter used by the FAA four carriers and at Piarco. The first Trinidad and Tobago Naval pilot to be killed was flying this type.

Gamecock – GLOSTER – Single engine, single seat, biplane fighter. Last wooden fighter used by the RAF.

Globemaster – DOUGLAS – Four engine transport with large nose loading doors, used by the USAF.

Goose – GRUMMAN – Twin engine light coastal patrol amphibian, used by the FAA at Piarco.

Hart – HAWKER – Single engine two seat biplane bomber that could outspace the fighters of its day.

Havoc – DOUGLAS – American name for the A20 with a solid nose and canon armament.

Helldiver – CURTIS – SB2C single engine, two seat, carrier borne dive bomber.

Hellcat – GRUMMAN – F6F single engine, single seat carrier borne fighter.

Heron – DE HAVILLAND – Four engine, 17 seat miniature airliner used by LIAT.

Hudson – LOCKHEED – Originally the Lockheed 14, but converted for the British into a twin engined anti-submarine bomber.

Hurricane – HAWKER – Single seat, single engine, eight gun fighter that fought the Battle of Britain.

Kingfisher – NAVAL AIRCRAFT FACTORY – OS2N single engine, two seat observation and patrol floatplane.

Lancaster – AVRO – Four engine heavy bomber capable of lifting the heaviest weapons. Five Trinidad and Tobago men died in Lancasters during the Second World War. It was the principal British night bomber.

Latécoère – PIERRE LATÉCOÈRE – Two types: single engine, open cockpit high wing four seat and twin engine six seat, enclosed cabin airliner.

Loening 0A 1A – LOENING – Single engine, two seat biplane floatplane with the engine mounted at the front of the hull.

Long Horn – FARMAN – Single tear mounted engine between twin booms with biplane wings. This two seat machine was the standard World War I trainer. It got its name from the two long curved skids sticking out ahead.

Lockheed 12 – LOCKHEED – Twin engine, twin tailed, seven seat airliner. Used by BWIA.

Lockheed 14 – LOCKHEED – Twin engine, twin tail, eight seat airliner reconverted Hudson bomber. Used by BWIA.

Lockheed Lodestar – LOCKHEED – Twin engine, twin tailed, fourteen seat airline. Used by BWIA.

Marathon – HANDLEY PAGE – Four engine navigation trainer.

Mariner – MARTIN – Twin engine, twin tailed, patrol and anti-submarine seaplane. Extensively used from Chaguaramas.

Martinet – MILES – Single engine, training and communication aircraft.

Meteor – GLOSTER – Single seat, twin engine jet fighter that saw service at the end of the Second World War.

Mosquito – DE HAVILLAND – Twin engine, two seat, plywood construction light bomber also produced as a fighter. Nicknamed "the wooden

wonder".

Moth – DE HAVILLAND – DH 60 – Two seat, biplane, single engine fabric covered light aircraft. The first aircraft registerred in Trinidad and Tobago was a Moth.

Mustang – NORTH AMERICAN – Single engine, single seat long range fighter.

OS2N – NAVAL AIRCRAFT – USN designation for a Kingfisher.

Oxford – AIRSPEED – Twin engine, multi-seat light communications and training aircraft.

P-39 Aircobra – BELL – Single engine, single seat fighter that had the engine mounted within the fuselage immediately behind the cockpit.

P-40 Tomahawk – CURTISS – Single engine, single seat fighter of conventional design.

Proctor – PERCIVAL – Single engine, three seat communications and navigation trainer. Used by the FAA at Piarco.

Puss Moth – DE HAVILLAND – High wing, single engine light aircraft used by many pioneers for long distance record-breaking flights.

RE 8 – ROYAL AIRCRAFT FACTORY – Single engine, two seat biplane reconnaissance aircraft.

Reliant – STINSON – High wing radial engined light aircraft. Used as a trainer by the FAA at Piarco.

Roc – BLACKBURN – Single engine, twin seat, low winged fighter with a four gun turret mounted behind the cockpit. Used at Piarco as a target tug.

SE 5 – ROYAL AIRCRAFT – Single engine, single seat biplane fighter. The SE5A was a more powerful version.

Sea Hawk – HAWKER – Graceful, single engine, all weather naval jet fighter, with twin booms and rudders.

Sea Venom – DE HAVILLAND – Two seat, single engine, all weather naval jet fighter, with twin booms and rudders.

Shackleton – AVRO – Four engine, long range maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine aircraft.

S-38B – SIKORSKY – Twin engine, twin tailed seaplane used by Pan Am to bring the first mail to Trinidad.

Snipe – SOPWITH – Single rotary engine, single seat biplane fighter.

Spitfire – SUPERMARINE – Classic single engine, single seat fighter flown by a large number of Trinidad and Tobago men, five of whom died while flying the type.

Shark – BLACKBURN – Single engine, two to three seat, biplane torpedo bomber and reconnaissance aircraft.

Stirling – SHORT – Four engine night bomber in use before either the Lancaster or Halifax.

Strato Clipper – BOEING – Four engine, thirty-two seat pressurised airliner used by Pan Am.

Strator Cruiser – BOEING – Four engine, long range development of the Strato Clipper.

Tempest – HAWKER – Single seat, single engine fighter with a level speed of well over four hundred miles per hour.

Tiger Moth – DE HAVILLAND – DH82, single engine, two seat biplane trainer.

Typhoon – HAWKER – Single engine, single seat ground attack fighter.

Vega – LOCKHEED – Single engine high wing light aircraft used in many long distance record-breaking flights.

Ventura – LOCKHEED – FV-1 Harpoon. The Ventura was a military adaptation of the Lodestar used by the US Navy as an anti-submarine bomber.

Viking – VICKERS – Twin engine airline with 24 to 27 passenger seats used by BWIA.

INDEX

Abdullah, Mohammed bin; 12.
Accoo, Francis; 111.
Achilles, Albrecht; 81.
Acquatella, Jose, 31.
Aerovias Brazil, 88; 117.
Agostini, Carl, 35; 59; 97; 104; 105.
Ahwai, James, 105.
Air Board, 30.
Air France, 39; 117.
Air Training Scheme, (ATS), 61; 62; 72; 75; 84; 85; 100; 110; 111; 112.
"Ajax", 56.
Alcazar, J., 91.
Alexis, Maurice, 33.
Alston, (Major) G.R.G., 84.
Alston, Sqn. Ldr. Michael, 114.
Alston, Wilfred, 51.
American Air Transport Command, 73.
American Export Airlines, 93.
Andrews, 63.
Anderson, 47.
Archer, Nathaniel, 45.
Auguste, Uric, 104; 105.
Bain, Donald, 105.
Baldwin, 4.
Ball, Capt. Albert, 9; 10.
Bambury, Cecelia, 41.
Banks, Wing Commander, Maurice, 98, 103.
BBC, 9.
Beaden, E., 52.
Beetham, Edward, Sir, 115
Bel Air Hotel, 64; 108; 109.
Best, Jim, 111.
Bhagwansingh, Sam, 105.
Biptee, Mrs., 35.
Boardman, Winston, 105.
Boland Brothers, 2.
Boland, Frank, 1; 2; 3; 4; 12; 16; 27.
Boland, Sonny, 104; 105.
Bolton, Margrete, 88.
Bonyon, Frank Vernon, 8; 9.
"Booker T. Washington", 47
Booth, John, 101.
Borde, Edgar, 111.
Bourne, Sqn. Ldr. Ian, 110.
Bowen, Horace, 4; 7; 12; 14; 20; 56; 92.
Bradshaw, Leslie, 45; 46.
Brash, Charles, 108.
British West Indies (BWI) Regiment, 6.
Brown, Bill, 112.
Brown, R.M., 55; 61.
Bryden, Richard, 85.
"Buenos Aires", 23.
Burton, Captain R.H., 69.
Bushe, Lt. Charles, 114.
Bushe, John, 11.
Butler, Tubal Uriah, 67; 102; 106.
BOAC, 111.
British South American Airlines, 101, 111.
BWIA, 65; 66; 71; 72; 73; 79; 86; 87; 88; 93; 98; 99; 100; 101; 103; 107; 109; 110; 111; 112; 113; 114; 116; 117; 119.

Cabral, Elizabeth (First woman pilot), 102.
Captain K., 99; 100.
Carlsen, Captain Kenneth V, 77.
Carrington, John, 57; 60; 92; 99.
Caroni Ltd., 44.
Carrington, E.R., 60.
Carroll, J.F., 55; 56; 60; 61; 65.
"Castor", 101.
Central Union Trust Corporation, 28.
"Chaguaramas", 17.
Chancellor, (Lt. Col.) John Robert, 17.
Cipriani, Arthur Andrew, 15; 39; 46; 52.
Cipriani, Daisy, 39; 40.
Cipriani, Mikey, 39; 40; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45; 46; 51; 52; 58.
Clausen, Nicholai, 82.
Clifford (Sir) Bede, 102.
Cochran-,Patrick (Major) Pat, 16; 17; 21; 77.
Collège deTivoli, 32.
Colonial Hospital, 3.
Compagnie Générale Aeropostale, 31; 35; 37; 38; 39; 40; 58; 97.
Cresswel, (Sargeant), 98.
Crick, Daisy, 48.
Cross, Ulric, 92.
Crouch, Ralph, 105.
Crown Point, 58; 65; 66; 79; 80; 112; 113; 117 118.
Crutch, K.T., 87.
Cummings, Phillip, 11.
Davis, Alan, 70.
Dargue, (Major), 20.
De Havilland, 39.
De la Porte, Andre, 49.
De la Rosa Eugene, 50; 54.
De Meillac brothers, 91.
Department of Civil Aviation, 96; 104; 105.
Des Iles, L.E., 50.
De Verteuil, George, 34; 35; 37.
Dickson, William, 11.
Dobson, John, 88; 113.
Dornier, Claude, 25.
Dos Santos (Sir) Errol, 111.
Drysden (Lt.) John, 88.
Duggan, Bernado, 19.
Dunn, Rupert, 11.
Essex, (Capt.) A., 52.
"Exeter", 56.
Farfan, Esmond, 100; 102; 111.
Farfan, Fernand, 98; 111.
Ferdinand, Archduke, 5.
Fleet Air Arm (FAA), 66; 73; 75; 82; 83; 86; 93; 94; 101; 103; 114.
Flemming, Basil, 97; 104; 105.
Fokker, Anthony, 49.
Forster Commission, 67.
Forsythe, 47.
Franchise Committee, 67.
Franco, Yolanda, 88.
Francois, Elma, 48.
Frederick Karl Prince of Prussia, 6.
Fuller, Frank, 55; 111.

Gibb, Dolores, 88.
Gilkes, Leslie, 91.
Gomez, General, 38.
"Goodwill Fliers", 31; 47; 107.
Gordon, Alex, 87.
Goshawk H.M.S., 64; 94.
Government Finance Committee, 53.
Grant, Kenneth Lindsay, 85.
Grant (Sir) Lindsay, 11.
Grant, T. Geddes, 87.
Grier, (Mrs.), 24.
Grier (Sir) Selwyn, 51.
Grogan, Jerry, 88.
Hamel-Smith, A. (Sqdn. Ldr.), 52.
Hamid, Sonny, 108.
Head (S/Lt.), 63.
Hinkler (Sqdn. Ldr.) Bert, 28; 42.
Hirst, 103.
Hitchins, C., 52.
Hitler, Adolf, 85; 91.
Hobson, Eric, 4; 12; 13; 14; 21; 42; 56.
Hobson, Harold, 42.
Hobson, (Sir) Patrick, 119.
Hollis, Governor Sir Claude, 24; 38.
Hollis, Lady, 23; 24; 38; 41.
Horne, Alfred, 11.
Hosten, Percy, 39.
Huggins, Mrs., 56.
Hull Cordell, 68.
"Humming Bird", 41; 43; 44; 45.
Ingalls, Laura, 48.
Jeffers, Audrey, 47.
Johnson, 55.
Johnson, Sylvia, 88.
Johnston, (Mayor) Gaston, 30.
Jolly, Dr., 61.
Joseph, Collins, 98.
Junior, 100.
Kapitsky, Rolf, 89; 90; 91.
Karamath, John, 104.
Karl Prince Frederick, 6.
Karohi, 42.
Kelshall, A.S., 62.
Kelshall, Gaylord, 108.
Kelshall, Phillip W., 99; 108.
Kelshall, P.W., 119.
Kent, Duke and Duchess of, 25.
KLM, 49; 50; 54; 58; 59; 60; 65; 93; 117.
Knaggs, Kenneth John, 9; 10.
Knox, Percy J., 11.
Lafont, Marcel, 35.
Lancaster, W.W. 28; 29.
Lange, Emmanuel "Noche", 32; 88.
Lange, Maurice, 31; 32; 33; 34; 35; 37; 38; 42; 47; 50; 102; 117.
Lange, Yvonne, 102.
Lapeyrouse Cemetery, 3; 19.
Latécoère, Pierre, 31; 35; 37.
Lawrence of Arabia, 13.
Leche, J., 65.
Leche (Mrs.) 65.
Leeward Islands Air Trans-

port (LIAT), 117; 119.
Le Hunte, George, 2.
Leicester Flying Club, 55.
Lemoine, 37.
Lenigan, John, 110.
Lewis, Cecil, 9.
Lickfold, "Erl" Edmund, 6; 7; 13; 39; 40; 41; 42; 43; 44; 56; 58.
Light Aeroplane Club of Trinidad and Tobago (LAC), 34; 52; 53; 54; 55; 56; 57; 58; 60; 61; 64; 72; 84; 98; 100; 101; 106; 108; 109; 111; 114.
Linea Aeropostal Venezolana, 38; 117.
Lindbergh, Charles, 21; 22.
Littlepage, B.B., 22.
Lothian, Lord, 68.
Luengo, Eamon, 88.
Lyder, Garth, 57.
"Mad Mullah", 12; 13.
Maingot, Keith, 102.
Marshall-Beard, Peal, 110; 111.
Maxwell, 9.
Mc Cartney, Harold, 109.
Mc Donald, Alex, 85.
Mc Intosh, Frank Graham, 7.
Mc Kenzie, Tony, 33.
Mendez y Relaez, Antonio 48.
Merry, David, 91.
Meyers, Tommy, 92.
Military Transport Command, 93.
Mitchell, Bill, 108; 109.
Moyne Commission, 67.
Mucurapo Cemetery, 30; 46.
Muller, (Col.) A.W., 55.
Murray, A., 52.
Murray, A.D.S., 101.
Murray, (Hon.) K.T., 87; 101.
Nathan, (Major), 31.
Neal and Massy, 29.
Newark, A., 97.
New York Rio Buenos Aries (NYRBA) Lines, 23; 24; 44.
Olivero, Edwardo, 19.
O'Reilly, Lennox, 87.
Patience, Eric, 97; 104; 105; 114.
Paton, Lionel, 87.
Pan Am, 21; 22; 23; 24; 25; 30; 38; 44; 45; 48; 49; 50; 62; 63; 72; 73; 93; 97; 106; 108; 109; 112; 117.
Pawan, J.L. Dr., 23.
People's National Movement (P.N.M.), 114; 115.
Perreira, A.N., 60.
Perreira, C.V., 62.
Perreira, Neville, 102.
Perry Gate, 19.
Persad, Sumair, 110.
Peyton, L.G., 62.
Phillips, (Lieutenant Commander), 63.
Piarco Aerodrome, 50; 112.
Piarco International Airport, 38; 104; 120.
Piarco Savannah, 32; 33;

40.
Pickthorne, Charles M., 5; 6; 7.
Pitts, Edward, 62.
Pitts, J.J., 62.
Pogson, Desmond, 11.
"Pollux", 101.
"Port of Spain", 24.
Prentice, (Lt. Commander) 63; 69.
Prignault, 31; 35.
Princess Royal, 120.
Queen's Park Hotel, 4.
Queen's Royal College (QRC), 7; 9; 52.
Rahr, John, 87; 111.
Ramdass, Joseph, 105.
"Red Devil", 4; 11; 17.
Rhys-Davids, 9.
"Rio de Janeiro", 23.
Richthofen, 9; 10; 11.
Rochford, D.G., 62.
Rodriguez, Russell, 105.
Roger, M., 31.
Rooks, Frank, 12.
Royal Air Force (RAF), 11; 12; 13; 16; 21; 41; 50; 57; 60; 64; 76; 84; 91; 92; 99; 109; 110; 116.
Royal Aero Establishment, 13; 20.
Royal Flying Corps (RFC) 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 17.
Rowe, Basil, 22.
Ruthven-Murray, A., 51; 52; 56.
Sahadeo, 35.
Samaroo, Leslie, 108.
"Sampaio Correia", 18.
"San Antonio", 20.
"San Francisco", 20.
"Savoia", 19.
Scharf, Helen, 88.
Schmidt, George, 3; 4; 11; 12; 16; 17; 27; 28.
Scott, Gervais, 11.
Sharma, 55
Shell Oil Company, 34.
Sheppard, C.Y., 61.
Sheppard, George, 112.
Short, Mayow, 65.
Singh, Mohan, 111.
Smith, C.D.A., 62.
Smith, L.G., 62.
Solis, Felix, 5.
Solis, Jose Geronimo, 4; 5.
Solomon, Patrick, 115.
"Specialist", 17.
St. Hilaire, Frank "Jack", 44; 51; 52; 59.
"St. Louis", 20.
St. Mary's Cemetery, 3.
Stone, A. (Major), 56; 57.
Stone, Herbert, 57.
Storey, (Major) Alan, 51; 52; 61.
Sutherland, Reverend, 3.
Talbot, (Lt.) B.T., 19.
Tilton, J., 22; 23.
Thomas, Frank, 111.
Thomas, Michael, 97; 104.
Toolsie, 48.
"Trinidad", 24.
Trinidad Chamber of Commerce, 8.
Trinidad Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (TRNVR), 61; 86.
Trinidad Workingmen's

Association, 5; 15; 18; 19.
Trippe, Juan Terry, 22.
Tucker, Louis, 24.
Vachet, Paul, 31; 32; 33; 35; 37; 38.
Venables, H.G., 62.
Vincent, Claude, 4; 13; 14; 20; 57; 92; 109.
Von Letow-Vorbeck, 6.
Waller, (Major) Alfred J., 74.
Webb, A., 51.
Webb, (Flt. Lt.) Mervyn, 116.
Weekes, Ruth, 102.
West Indies Aviation Committee, 29.
West Indies Conference, 29.
Wight, George, 87.
Wight, Gerald, 87.
Williams, Eric, 114; 115.
Williams, (Lt.) R.G., 61.
Wilson, "Snark", 65.
Wood Commission, 18.
Woodburn, Robert, 48.
Wooding, (Sir) Hugh, 119.
Wright Brothers, 1; 2.
Wright, (Sqdn. Ldr.) G. 52.
Wright, Wilbur, 2.
Yerex, Lowell, 59; 65; 66; 87; 88; 101.
Young, Hubert, Sir, 52; 54; 56; 58; 59; 61; 63; 65; 66; 67; 68; 84.
Young (Lady) Margaret, 52; 53; 56; 59; 63; 65.
Yucette, Lawrence, 87.

Airlines Mentioned

Air France, 39; 117.
Aerolineas Argentinas, 117.
Aerovias Brazil, 88; 117.
American Air Transport Command, 73.
American Export Airlines, 93.
British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), 87; 111; 117; 119.
British South American Airlines, 101; 111.
British West Indian Airways (BWIA), 65; 66; 71; 72; 73; 79; 86; 87; 88; 93; 98; 99; 100; 101; 103; 107; 109; 110; 111; 112; 113; 114; 116; 117; 119.
Compagnie Générale Aeropostal, 31; 35; 37; 38; 39; 40; 58; 97.
Imperial Airways, 60.
KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines), 49; 50; 54; 58; 59; 60; 65; 93; 117.
Linea Aeropostal Venezolana (LAV), 38; 117.
Leeward Islands Air Transport (LIAT), 117; 119.
Military Air Transport Command, 93.
New York Rio Buenos Aires Lines (NYRBA) 23; 24; 44.
Pan American Airways System (Pan Am), 21;

22; 23; 24; 25; 30; 38;
44; 45; 48; 49; 50; 62;
63; 72; 73; 93; 97; 106;
108; 109; 112; 117.
Transportes Aeros Centro
Americanos (TACA), 59.
Trans Canada, 117.

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